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Education as a Political Act: Drawing from critical and feminist pedagogies to build and implement an adult education curriculum

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Education as a political act:

**Drawing from critical and feminist pedagogies to build and implement an adult
education curriculum**

**A Masters Project presented to
The Center for International Education
at the University of Massachusetts Amherst**

**In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Education**

**by
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Section 1: Introduction and Background

“Literacy and adult basic education are building blocks for democratic community development” (The Literacy Project, 2003.)

Many questions and curiosities arose for me while, during my last year of graduate school, I volunteered to help create a curriculum for use in adult education (AE) classes in Western Massachusetts that introduced issues around the war in Iraq. Books Building Bridges, a local collective of individuals and organizations interested in community education on these issues spearheaded the curriculum project. The Literacy Project teachers and administrators played a major role in developing and implementing this curriculum.

I start by trying to deconstruct some issues that arise at the intersection of education and politics. The AE classroom cannot be separated from its historical context because of the ways adult learners directly engage with their social, political, and economic surroundings. As I will discuss in more detail later, a common approach in the US sees education as a means to generate skilled workers, increase employability, and thus strengthen the economy. Similarly, this approach views education as a tool for socialization with in a democratic society and political system. For me, education in general is an inherently political activity to the extent that it works toward its purported ideal in a democratic society – that of fostering critical thinkers and reflective learners who are able to make informed decisions and participate in the democratic process (Dewey, 1916.)

Education prepares learners to function within these existing systems. However, mass public schooling has not historically been used as a tool to challenge the status quo or to altar the balance of power within the classroom, or within larger social and political structures (Giroux, 1988). Some strands of AE use pedagogies that may be more empowering to

learners. These pedagogies originate from social theories that acknowledge that learners in their every day lives might not experience a sense of power. Approaching AE from this perspective lends the opportunity to experiment with altering the power relations that learners and instructors normally expect or experience (see hooks, 1994, Vella, 2002, Merriam and Caffarella, 1999.)

In an educational experience, the instructor and the learner engage the subject matter within the social and political context to create learning opportunities. Since education relies on interaction between people and groups; it is a social process in which power relations are always implied (Jarvis, 1992; Giroux, 1981.) For education planners and teachers, making decisions on how to organize learning opportunities (what material is presented and how it is dealt with in the learning environment) involves a certain amount of power that affects the other factors in the equation. A conscientious education planner might consider his or her own motivations, assumptions, larger structural influences, and the learner's capacity to shape the learning experience and act as a decision maker (Vella, 2002.)

How those people in authoritative roles – planners, instructors, for example - wield that power may determine what is taught, how it is taught, and what the learning outcome may be. Hutchinson (1978) suggests planners ask, “*Who needs what as defined by whom?*” Many adult education theorists (for example, Knowles, 1978, and Wenger, 1996) emphasize the idea of relevancy to daily life in order for the learners to be connected to the issues, motivated to learn, and invested in the learning experience. In addition to knowing who the learners are and what their needs are, planners must also be aware of their own position in the process. Especially when the curriculum makers are also the instructors who will implement the curriculum in their classrooms, they are in the unique position of already having an established relationship with and knowledge of the learners. They are better able to envision

the class interaction with the material and what kind of response and outcome to expect.

Those who develop curriculum and make decisions about what to use in the classroom and how it will be used also hold a certain amount of power and responsibility in the learning environment.

In this paper, I address the idea of power relationships and political issues that are naturally a part of the AE environment, and even more a part of the TLP classroom environment when the BBB/TLP curriculum is implemented. To do this, I explore adult learning theories that inform TLP's planning and practice, drawing from two stances for viewing education, functionalism and conflict theory. Critical literacy, informed by conflict theory, is one methodology I propose to use in TLP classes when implementing a politically charged curriculum. I analyze the use of critical literacy for this curriculum in light of social hierarchies and power relations represented in the TLP classes. I focus on incorporating a gender lens into the curriculum content and implementation, as this is one gap that I perceived. Lastly, I will make another small contribution to the curriculum by adding the gender perspective. I will locate and compile resources that lend a feminist perspective to each unit that could potentially enrich the curriculum and contribute to its ongoing development.

Introduction to the BBB/TLP curriculum project

Over the past two years, I had the opportunity to work with adult educators in a local AE organization, The Literacy Project. I was part of a team of TLP instructors and administrators that developed a curriculum to use in adult education classrooms in Western Massachusetts. The curriculum was designed to help AE instructors introduce issues around the war in Iraq. The curriculum aimed to provide a global perspective to TLP's already

existing curriculum and to promote social justice and political awareness both locally and across national boundaries. I had long been interested in the idea of education as inseparable from the political and social context, and in education linking communities on a global level, so the TLP curriculum building experience gave me the opportunity to closely investigate these and other related issues. A few of these emerging issues evolved into sections of this paper.

First, I observed some of the dilemmas the TLP workers faced when planning and implementing a politically charged curriculum. In the states and worldwide, AE as it is practiced has historically embraced educational methods and philosophies that address more issues in the learners' social and political contexts. Since AE generally operates under different rules and assumptions from traditional education, the AE environment can lend itself more readily to projects such as the TLP curriculum that would not normally be acceptable in more formal, traditional educational settings.

However flexible the TLP environment was about the way instructors introduced political issues in class, I observed that most TLP workers were still conflicted over their roles as educators – between the more traditional role of the objective facilitator, and the role historically more associated with AE of dialoguing and political engagement. In this paper, I explore TLP educators' perceptions of their roles as curriculum makers, authority figures, instructors, and co-learners in a participatory, non-formal adult learning environment. Their perceptions about their roles, the purpose of AE, objectives of the curriculum, and assumptions they make about the learners may affect key decisions such as the material they chose and approaches they use to implement a politically charged issues around the war when introducing political in the classroom.

I was intrigued by gender issues that were decidedly absent in the curriculum materials, as well as in any discussions in TLP curriculum development meetings. This contradicts the very gendered nature of adult education in general and in Massachusetts, where women make up a majority of learners, administrators, and instructors. Since gender is such an integral piece of teaching or learning about social and political issues, I use a gender lens to look at the process of developing the curriculum, as well as the initial period of implementation. Considering the dearth of materials that gender in the curriculum, and noting the explicitly political nature of the curriculum, I compiled a set of suggested resources that deals with gender for each section of the curriculum. This appears as an annotated bibliography, annexed on to this paper, which I am submitting to TLP as my contribution to the ongoing development of their curriculum.

Overview of the paper

This paper is part reflection on the curriculum building experience and part analysis of the experience with regards to the academic literature on adult education. Reflection on the experience and discussion of some theories in AE are followed by a collection of suggested resources for the curriculum, many of which speak to the issues I highlight in the paper. Adding a gender perspective to the curriculum will not only touch on issues that are commonly overlooked, but it will provide a more complete picture of issues discussed. Because the curriculum will undergo a process of constant evolution, I do not consider this project a comprehensive, finished product. I consider my contribution as just one part of many in an ongoing process. I hope that my suggestions for additions to the curriculum will be a starting point for further exploration to engage the learners and instructors at TLP, and to foster the ongoing curriculum building process.

After a brief overview of TLP and underlying ideas behind my research in section one, section two explains the curriculum's stated purposes and provides an overview of the units and their content – materials, resources, and lesson plans. I discuss the process by which the team made decisions that shaped its practical implications, and the possible assumptions about AE and about TLP learners that affected the curriculum building process. This leads to a discussion on the instructors' request for dialogue facilitation training, and the resulting training workshop. Section two introduces the curriculum builders' varying perceptions on what the instructor's role should be in a participatory adult education setting. Finally, I discuss a few observations from the beginning of the implementation stage that further illustrate theoretical and practical issues of interest.

In section three, I expand on some of the ways that common assumptions in traditional education, as well as adult education theory, have informed the instructors' perceptions of their role. I introduce historical methods and theories of adult education that shape TLP's philosophy and practice, specifically those that led TLP to engage in the BBB coalition. I deconstruct some ways that the field of adult education has evolved into a different kind of pedagogy than traditional education, and how this is apparent in the TLP classrooms. Instructors' perceptions of the purpose and ideals of adult education, as well as their roles as curriculum makers and dialogue facilitators in a participatory learning environment shape what they feel is acceptable practice in the AE classroom. This leads to section four, an overview of critical pedagogy/critical literacy, and how it can be applied to this situation for implementing the BBB/TLP curriculum.

The fifth section looks at gender issues implicated in the AE/TLP environment, and as one of several perspectives that is not yet represented in the curriculum. My approach for discussing gender issues is that it is a two-sided coin – gender is not just a code word for

“women.” Gender issues affect both men and women, so introducing these issues in the classroom can have an affect outside of the classroom for both men and women. I discuss the possibility of using feminist pedagogy as another means of enhancing the BBB/TLP curriculum. Through discussing the curriculum with learners and considering at the population of women learners in Western Massachusetts, I found some aspects of their learning experience that make their interests, problems, and roles unique. I attempt to respond to those interests, problems and roles by connecting the existing curriculum to gender themes that are or could be included in the curriculum.

Methodology

With an interest in nonformal AE and literacy but no previous experience in the field of AE, I began my graduate studies by visiting a TLP classroom. This paper is based on two years of readings in graduate seminars and intermittent experience with TLP. My experiences included class observations, interviews with learners and TLP workers, and participation in two major TLP projects. The curriculum development was the second of those two. Varied experience over two years helped me grasp how TLP functioned as an organization, and introduced me to their methodologies of AE.

Throughout these two years I kept thorough, if not organized, records of my experiences with TLP. For interviews and observations I took copious notes. The first year's project evaluation consisted of an email survey and subsequent analysis and set of feedback, which I submitted as both a term paper and a report to TLP. For the curriculum building process, I took notes in meetings and in formal and informal interviews with participants. For background research on TLP and adult education in Massachusetts for this and other papers, I referred to agency websites, government websites, and working papers and reports.

Reading and discussion in graduate seminars enhanced my theoretical understanding of what I was observing and doing in TLP. Although I found that academic literature might not take the place of practical knowledge and professional wisdom, connecting my experiences to the literature of adult education has added depth to my perspective. Situating the practical experience in the context of academic work (and vice versa) enriched my overall experience and helped to somewhat break down the perceived binary of theoretical and practical work in AE.

In the process, I encountered a few limitations to participating in the curriculum development, and subsequently recording and articulating my experience. First, I held a unique position as both an observer and a participant in the curriculum development process. As such, I was not only one of the few members of the curriculum development team who would *not* have the chance to implement it, but I was also an outsider to the organization in general, having spent minimal time in TLP classrooms and lacking extensive, direct work with learners. Clearly this was a challenge for me in building my section of the curriculum. Instead of the daily interaction with learners and the wealth of professional wisdom of TLP's educators, I entered the curriculum building process with only a vague theoretical understanding of the adult education environment, and a professional background of teaching English to youth. My work would have benefited from a more thorough understanding of the TLP learning environment and TLP learners that one can only gain by spending extensive periods of time in the place. Throughout the process, I was able to identify and challenge some of my own assumptions of the AE environment, instructors, and learners.

Additionally, my role as both an observer and a participant lent complications to writing this paper. I found that when discussing the process of curriculum development, the line between subject and object was blurred. Referring to the curriculum development team

members in the third person was not quite accurate, and neither was it always appropriate to count myself among them. Since I shared their experience in some ways and did not in other ways, I tried to specify those ways at relevant points in this paper.

I focused my work on the process of the curriculum development and the participants' ideas that shaped the content, as opposed to the content or the curriculum in action. Because of the curriculum's format, I am limited as to how much detail I can discuss in this paper, and therefore how thorough an analysis of the curriculum content I can complete. On the website, each section appears to be a concise outline of hyperlinks, other resources, and notes. Upon "entering" the curriculum, the user clicks on hyperlinks and enters the World Wide Web, where the possibilities of finding resources are endless. Therefore, my description and analysis (however superficially) centers around the outline and immediate links to web pages in the curriculum.

Because of the timing of my paper and TLP's project, I was only able to observe the first few weeks of implementation in TLP classrooms, as opposed to a more complete picture rendered by a longitudinal study. I believe that observing more of the ideas put into action would have taught me a tremendous amount about the issues that arose. However, I am certain that the process of curriculum building shed much light on the questions I started with and gave me plenty of fodder for discussion in this paper.

After two years of working with TLP educators, I began to have a better understanding of TLP specifically and of AE in general. This paper should link together my observations, participation in the project, interviews, data from TLP and related organizations, and the academic literature in AE.

Background on The Literacy Project

“The Literacy Project (TLP) is a non-profit, community-based organization offering Adult Basic Education (ABE) & GED preparation services at five main sites. The agency incorporates community development, civic participation, health, computer technology, and arts/culture in its teaching. TLP's philosophy is based in an empowerment model that is learner-centered and participatory” (TLP, 2003).

Founded in 1984, TLP is a free program that offers a variety of classes including English as a Second Language (ESL), General Education Development (GED) test preparation, and Adult Basic Education (ABE.) Participants range from ages 16 to 60 and come from different cultural, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. The TLP website states that “each student brings a unique history and story” (TLP, 2003.) Some learners are working toward their GED in lieu of a high school diploma. Others just want to brush up on their math and writing skills to improve their performance at work or earn other credentials. Still others might be required to attend classes per parole officer or court order. Most learners are economically disadvantaged; many are working more than one job or are single parents, and they still make time for class once or twice a week. All learners bring with them a wide range of life experiences to contribute to TLP's learning environment. (See Section 4 for more information on learner demographics.)

According to a staff member, TLP's organizational structure is “a typical non-profit hierarchical democracy” (Paju, L., personal communication, November, 2004). At the head is a board of directors, which makes most of the major decisions. The board consists of local professionals, private donors, educators, writers, former students, former instructors, and other community members. An executive director oversees the five centers, aided by a program coordinator and a volunteer coordinator. At each site there is a director/instructor and usually one other instructor. Training and credentials of instructors vary, but most have

extensive experience in the AE field. Like many educational non-governmental organizations (NGOs), volunteers make up a significant part of the staff. The volunteer coordinator oversees training and supervision of dozens of volunteers for all of TLP's sites. Most volunteers must attend 18 hours of training on basic theoretical foundations of literacy and adult education and tutoring techniques for the classroom. Volunteers are asked to make a minimum six-month commitment and attend at least one class a week.

As a non-profit organization, TLP receives funds from private donors, foundations, and community fundraising. However, the majority of their the funding comes from the Massachusetts Department of Education, which mandates organizational functions such as what classes are taught. Recently, accountability to the state has become a more prominent issue, requiring TLP administrators to administer periodic tests and record data in a governmental database. Although they do not usually tailor learning experiences to this test, instructors and learners find that their generated themes can lead to learning opportunities that are relevant to test material.

Pioneer Valley Center for Adult Education – The Northampton site

My work with TLP began in the Fall of 2004, during my first semester of Masters studies at the Center for International Education. The class work for a course I took on Education for Community Development combined academic study with practical experience in a local community organization. The instructor suggested I visit TLP because I had been interested in learning more about adult education and literacy. Throughout that first semester, I spent time at the Northampton site, Pioneer Valley Center for Adult Education (PVCAE.) I visited a classroom on several occasions, conducted informal and formal interviews with the

instructor and learners, and wrote my final research project for that course on the program's philosophy and practices, and how that related to adult learning theory I had studied thus far.

PVCAE is representative of TLP in many ways. A director/instructor, a second instructor, several volunteers, and administrative personnel run the center. They offer four classes: Life Skills, Math and Science, General Educational Development (GED) preparation, and Adult Education (AE). The AE class covers intermediate to higher literacy levels for learners who are also studying for the GED or just there to sharpen their skills. This class is comprised of basic adult education classes such as social studies, reading, writing, math, history, science, and computer skills. Like most TLP sites, PVCAE offers classes to meet a variety of educational needs and levels.

Between ten and seventeen people attend each of the four classes, with each student attending an average of six hours per week. Students are encouraged to set their own goals and objectives for their participation in the program, so depending on what they want to accomplish and the level at which they enter, they could be active in the program from a few months to a few years. Aligned with TLP's admissions process, PVCAE has rolling admissions and waiting lists for all classes, so that when one person leaves the class, the next person can enter. This keeps class size to a minimum and prompts learners to attend classes regularly.

Students do not pay for enrollment in TLP. The issue of fees is an ongoing debate in the world of ABE. Some believe that learners value a service more when they have to pay even a nominal fee to participate. However, the director of PVCAE explained that the free service does not negatively affect attendance or performance. The high expectations of self-directed learning, minimum attendance requirement of 70%, and the long waiting lists seem to be the biggest incentives for current students to stay committed to the program (Paju, L.,

personal communication, November 2004.) As evident from conversations with the instructor and learners, most students do not take it for granted and usually make their best effort to attend. Even so, full attendance is a challenge for adults responsible for one or two jobs and a household.

Active participation is an integral part of the learning environment at TLP, especially in the Adult Education class. At the beginning of each of the four cycles in the year, the instructor and learners brainstorm topics and issues they would like to address during that cycle, similar to a Freirian method (1970) called “generative themes”. The instructors try to incorporate as many of these themes into their lesson plans as they can. During the course of the cycle, it is also essential for the instructor to listen to the participants and adjust lesson plans and topics, and learners are encouraged to provide ongoing feedback to instructors on their needs. As characteristic of the participatory learning environment that TLP espouses, many of the materials are instructor and learner-generated.

The first day I observed a class at PVCAE, the twelve learners and an instructor welcomed me to a table in the middle of the room where they all sat. For lack of space, I sat outside of the circle while I noted down observations for the first half of their three-hour class. For the second half, the learners had the remaining time to work on individual projects. Some learners worked on math while others wrote or revised their autobiography, and I mingled and talked with them. After three class observations and several informal interviews with learners, I sat down with the site director/instructor, who provided valuable insights and a lot of the information about TLP that I have referenced in this paper.

Over six weeks spent learning about TLP, I was impressed by the enthusiasm of the students and instructor at PVCAE, as well as their embodiment of commitment to

empowering community members through education. TLP's mission statement, taped to the wall in the foyer and again in the classroom, portrayed this commitment:

"The Literacy Project provides adult basic education programs and opportunities that support participants to engage meaningfully and equitably in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of their communities" (TLP, 2003.)

TLP's philosophy seeks to empower learners through their daily classroom experience and, by extension strengthening their communities. As an organization, TLP arranges classroom practices around the awareness of the impacts that continuing education can have in adults' lives, inside the classroom, and in their homes, workplaces, and communities.

TLP integrates learning and civic participation

Since I began working with TLP staff, I have observed a few ways in which TLP facilitates individual empowerment and helps learners deal with issues important to their daily lives. TLP has an established record of creating awareness of social, political, and economic issues that affect learners. They do this by connecting learning experiences in the classroom to the civic participation and political involvement in the wider community. Depending on the instructor and the class, some might focus more and some less on community participation and political awareness.

One example of this is illustrated with their Community Relations Board (CRB.) The CRB brought together executive board members, site staff, volunteers, learners, and other interested community members at each site. Its purpose was to help each site be more autonomous and integrated into their communities. The CRB conducted awareness

campaigns; met with community leaders and businesspeople; recruited volunteers and board members; organized local fundraisers; and engaged in other context-specific projects that would help them participate more effectively in their community, raise awareness, or better serve their needs. I conducted a survey via email with the CRB participants in the five sites to find out how the CRB was functioning thus far. Based on the results of the survey, I provided feedback for the CRB members at TLP on how well the CRB was functioning and how it could be put to better use at each site. This was a learning experience for me to observe one of the mechanisms TLP has put in place in order to connect learners and their communities.

Other examples of projects that encourage civic participation include the Community Leaders Program, a leadership training workshop for learners and community members; the Northampton learners' community garden plot; and Orange learners' petition to the local bus service to solicit better public transportation in their rural area.

TLP's latest project to create the curriculum that deals with issues around the war in Iraq illustrates the educators' belief in activism through AE and community education. A local community education initiative, Books Building Bridges (BBB) spearheaded a project to teach about the war in Iraq.

TLP joins Books Building Bridges

In August 2005, TLP was invited to participate in Books Building Bridges (BBB), a yearlong local collective whose aim was to build educational partnerships and raise awareness on the connection between education and politics, specifically on the war in Iraq.

"Books Building Bridges is a community-building project developed in order to acknowledge and foster a common human desire for learning, authentic connection and a healthy society while transcending political divisions in the

United States and the geographic and social distance between the United States and Iraq” (BBB, 2005.)

BBB’s stated objectives parallel TLP’s mission statement and guiding principles, one of which outlines the commitment “to creating positive social change by strengthening communities through educational programs and actions on the issues that affect learners’ lives” (TLP, 2003).

BBB was conceived over the summer of 2005 when a few members of the community, including representatives of the local branch of American Friends Service Committee, were inspired by the message in the Jeannette Winter’s 2004 storybook, *The Librarian of Basra*. This is a true story in which an Iraqi librarian who, with help from her community, works to save the book collection from her community’s library in the middle of a war zone. The story is told in a simple, succinct way, yet introduces serious, complicated issues that need further unraveling. The book uncovers some important implications of education on political awareness, community building, and collective action.

TLP joined BBB through connections to AFSC, along with local librarians, entrepreneurs, artists, educators, and activists. Currently there are 23 people in the working group, representing about 13 organizations, with another 10 affiliated organizations, including Baghdad University. The curriculum is just one of many projects that the BBB collective has organized.

BBB collective members believed that whether directly or indirectly, the war in Iraq affects the learners’ lives in Western Massachusetts, and TLP staff felt strongly about the need to create opportunities for dialogue around these issues. So TLP administration agreed to create a curriculum that would address the connection between education and political/social awareness of issues around the war. The curriculum was originally intended for TLP’s own

classrooms, but the audience has expanded since its conception to other AE organizations and individual public school teachers.

A brief overview of the BBB/TLP curriculum

The introduction to the curriculum summarizes its core objectives (BBB, 2005), all of which are critical to the adult learner's roles as a family member, community member, taxpayer, and citizen in a democratic society. The BBB/TLP curriculum consists of five units:

1. Understanding and Respecting Differences
2. Media Literacy
3. Impacts of War
4. Regional Understanding of Iraq/Middle East
5. US Economy, Policy, and War

(See a complete curriculum outline in Appendix A.)

The sequence of themes is designed so that the first two units establish the overarching values and skills needed to engage in the rest of the curriculum. The first unit/building block focuses on identity issues and tries to help learners position themselves within their social, political, geographic, and economic context. It provides lessons on identity awareness, stereotyping, and dialogue and communication skills. This unit includes, for example, sample activities on whiteness and antiracism. It also gives teachers resources for activities to teach tolerance and for resolving conflicts.

The second unit on media literacy looks at issues of access to and interpretation of information – critical thinking on how information is produced and presented to the public, and its affect on our daily lives. This unit on media literacy begins with sample activities to

teach about the Bill of Rights, freedom of the press, and moves through critical thinking in media messages, and how stereotypes and stigmas are recycled through media. Unit two also addresses ownership and biases in the media, as well as advertising and consumerism. The ideas of respecting differences and welcoming diversity are underlying concepts throughout each of the following units, as are critical thinking and media literacy. These are the threads that bind the rest of the curriculum together.

The last three units provide more substantial content specifically related to the war in Iraq, as the section headings suggest. Unit three deals with financial, human, and cultural costs of the war, as well as understanding US troops and rebuilding efforts in Iraq. Unit four gives a thorough overview of Middle Eastern and Iraqi history and culture. Unit five provides a documented timeline for stated rationale for the war in Iraq, as well as the war's effects on federal resource allocations.

The curriculum building process allowed a lot of flexibility for instructors to find new materials and adapt activities and resources to their classrooms. The ongoing development of the curriculum encourages learners to take an active role as well. The team was not aiming for a perfect finished product during the initial phases; the curriculum was designed to be an organically developing set of suggested resources, and what would be posted initially on the BBB website would be a starting point. In theory, any instructor or person who used it could adapt it to their educational context, or add suggested resources to the curriculum.

As I reviewed the content of the curriculum and reflected on observations of the process, some questions piqued my curiosity: What is this curriculum's place in the AE classroom, practically and theoretically speaking? What assumptions do the curriculum makers (myself included) might have about the learners, and how does this affect what resources are chosen for the curriculum? How will instructors facilitate constructive dialogues

if controversial issues arise in the classroom? Would learners benefit, and if so, how? And lastly, what are the connections between subject matter in the curriculum and learners' daily lives?

Social dimensions such as race and class are built into the suggested lessons and resources. Yet surprisingly, issues of gender arose only once or twice over the total of all five units. This gap was curious to me since all but one member of the ten people who worked on the curriculum were women, and over half the learners are women. Gender issues were implied but not immediately present in each section. For me, opening the avenues for incorporating gender issues seemed crucial to achieving the overarching goals of the curriculum – namely creating political awareness, advocating for social justice, and encouraging critical thinking in learners' various roles as voters, taxpayers, parents, and community members.

The next section is a more thorough description of the curriculum development process, and a closer look at some of the key decisions and assumptions that influenced the curriculum. I explore the concerns, biases, and anticipations that TLP instructors articulated during meetings and a training workshop as a way to introduce concepts of power relations in the TLP classroom that presented problems specifically for implementing the BBB/TLP curriculum.

Section 2: The Curriculum Making Process

Origins of the BBB collective

A children's storybook brought about the beginning of the BBB project and the curriculum. In August 2005, a local community artist and activist (for the purpose of the paper, I will call her Rosemary) read the children's book by Jeanette Winters entitled *The Librarian of Basra*. Based on a true story from present-day Iraq, it narrates a librarian's concern when she sees the war flaring up in her own city and neighborhood. Concerned for the collection of books in the library, she asks local officials to help her protect the public book collection, but they refuse. She decides to do whatever it takes to save the books, and she solicits help from her friends and neighbors in removing the books from the library. Little by little, the books are taken away and stored in a restaurant, her own house, and friends' houses. Just a few days after the library is emptied, it is bombed and burnt to the ground, but 30,000 volumes are kept safe.

Back in Western Massachusetts, Rosemary, the artist/community activist, was deeply moved by the story and some of the powerful messages it conveys. The storybook illustrated a few key issues that she deemed important for awareness raising in our own community. The book showed the importance of preserving history, culture, and knowledge in the form of printed word, especially in times of war. Iraq has had a long history of written word and libraries (Inati, 2003), and because of this, preserving the printed word has always been an important issue. Some historians speculate that Iraq has the oldest library in the world (probably more accurately called a collection of writings), dating back to the Assyrian empire. Early Mesopotamian cultures in the area that is today Iraq are also thought to have engendered one of the first written languages, Sumerian cuneiform (Inati, 2003.) During the earlier days of the war, the destruction and looting of museums and libraries in Iraq created

distress in the international arena. It brought the world's to attention Iraq's legacy of libraries. Hence, a central concern of the story in Winter's book is the importance of preserving Iraq's long history of libraries, especially those collections for daily public use.

Secondly, the story makes indirect references to Iraq's historically sound education systems. In the 1900s before the war, Iraq had the highest literacy rate, the most universities, and the most highly educated women in the Arab World. All of this has changed since the early 1990s when the first Gulf War destroyed much of the infrastructure that an education system relies on (Inati, 2003.)

Lastly, *The Librarian of Basra* shows how one brave and determined person can be a catalyst for important community efforts. While it is true that the volumes would not have been saved if it not for the librarian, she could not have accomplished anything alone. This illustrates the importance of community organization and collaboration. In culmination, the book highlights some of the effects that wartime can have on learning, books, information, and local groups that care about education. Institutions are destroyed, communities are split apart, and daily life in a war-torn environment cannot carry on as usual.

Rosemary brought these concerns to the Western Massachusetts office of American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), where she and the AFSC director discussed the issues highlighted in the book. Soon they developed the idea of a community education project that would link literacy, education, and learning in Western Massachusetts to communities in Iraq. They brainstormed possible projects that could raise awareness about the affects of war that are not usually addressed in mass media.

They also believed that people in our country seem detached from the effects of war, and rather unaffected by our country going to war, whether or not they supported the effort. They wanted to show people real connections between their lives and the lives of Iraqi people

so they focused the burgeoning project on how the war affects communities on both sides.

They wanted the war to be portrayed in a more human way than what is normally seen in the brief mentions on nightly news.

Rosemary and a local AFSC leader began inviting local booksellers, librarians, teachers, and adult education workers to take part in the project. The newly formed group of community educators drafted a mission statement that would be posted on a website, where the mission statement on their web page reads,

“Books Building Bridges is a community-building project developed to acknowledge and foster a common human desire for learning, authentic connection and a healthy society while transcending political divisions in the United States and the geographic and social distance between the United States and Iraq” (BBB, 2005.)

As indicated in the mission statement, a central theme throughout the entire BBB project is *transcendence*. The BBB/TLP team agrees that this curriculum should not push a political agenda. Rather, it intends to transcend political boundaries in order to locate, discuss, and analyze information in a way that promotes learning and awareness of issues. The project also transcends the geographic distance and borders that separate our communities from those in Iraq in an attempt to bridge differences between cultures and communities.

Other community education projects also emerged from the first brainstorming sessions of the BBB project. These include a book and computer drive to help restore Baghdad University's infrastructure, a pen pal program between public school children, and a children's art exchange. Some of the projects, including the book drive for Baghdad University and the children's art exchange, involved Iraqi and American activists traveling back and forth. Most of the projects that are now in place have been brought about through personal connections between Western Massachusetts and Iraq, generally using the Internet when physical travel is not possible.

Origins of BBB/TLP curriculum

BBB needed an educational organization to lead the community education aspect of the project. They invited TLP to be the educational partner in developing a program that would highlight the importance of literacy and education on both sides. TLP's board of directors readily accepted the BBB proposal, as it seemed to fit in to the overall philosophy and mission of TLP, which was to "engage meaningfully and equitably in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of their communities" (TLP, 2003.) After the proposal was accepted, teachers and administrators met to formulate a plan.

The curriculum building team was facilitated through regular monthly teacher meetings, where they usually divided up into voluntary taskforces, depending on extracurricular events and projects of the moment. Each curriculum team member volunteered his or her time, and other TLP staff did not participate if other projects were higher priority for them at the time. The process of conceptualizing the curriculum was collaborative. They brainstormed topics they felt were imperative to address around the war, and began categorizing and organizing, until they formulated an outline of five units (outline in Appendix B and description on p. 17.)

1. Understanding and Respecting Differences
2. Media Literacy
3. Impacts of War
4. Regional Understanding of Iraq/Middle East
5. US Economy, Policy, and War

The TLP curriculum makers believed these general categories to be the most imperative themes to include in what would be a skeletal outline of ideas to be covered in the curriculum. These were decided upon before I joined the team, so I was not privy to the process of generating the themes and organizing the five units. During the first few meetings

and before I joined, the team also made several key decisions and agreed on basic goals and purposes that informed the rest of the curriculum development process. The stated rationale and purposes were agreed on by the team and formally drawn up by the director of TLP. They are summarized from the Books Building Bridges web page below.

Stated Rationale and Purpose

To paraphrase, the introduction to the BBB/TLP curriculum states its main goals are to:

- Create an atmosphere that allows for open exchange of ideas.
- Facilitate communication and dialogue skills in a collaborative learning environment.
- Encourage critical thinking in order to analyze information.
- Generate knowledge and dialogue about the U.S. in Iraq/Middle East through resource finding and classroom discussion.
- Create more informed communities of citizens and decision makers in a democratic society.

Underlying assumptions and implied power relations

These objectives are all either explicitly or implicitly addressed in the curriculum outline, resources, and lesson plans. These goals also point to assumptions about the learners on the part of curriculum makers (myself included.) The stated rationale and purpose reflects the idea that the curriculum answers a need of the learners to be more politically savvy and active. Underlying this is the assumption that learners normally will not seek out the kind of information needed to help them become more informed voters, community members, and tax

payers (an example of this is evident in Section 4, TLP worker, personal communication, April 2006).

During meetings, several instructors voiced the concern that for the learners, the war in Iraq may seem a far-away topic for every day life in Western Massachusetts, and studying about it may seem boring or irrelevant to the adult basic education classroom. When I mentioned these concerns during an interview with TLP's director, she emphasized how relevant the war really is to our daily lives, and that this curriculum project could narrow the perceived gap between local AE classrooms and communities in Iraq. She indicated that the BBB/TLP initiative was a grass roots education project designed to create awareness of the impacts of war on education and communities – issues that *everyone* should be aware of, whether or not we agree with the war.

The first stated purpose for developing this curriculum demonstrates that TLP curriculum makers echo the director's notion, believing the war in Iraq is not separate from daily life in Western Massachusetts. In agreement with writers on globalization (such as Giddens, 2000), they acknowledge that the process of globalization brings people of the world closer in terms of communication, goods and ideas, and facilitates the closing of geographic distances. Every community here is somehow impacted in some way by this war; it should not be perceived as a far-away affair so disconnected from Western Massachusetts.

During one meeting, the curriculum team discussed the fact that some learners have friends or relatives who are serving in Iraq, and that the learners themselves are often target populations for military recruitment. Therefore, many felt a moral obligation to create learning opportunities about issues surrounding the war. The US presence in Iraq creates a real connection between people and communities, even though that connection may be masked by ignorance of the issues involved and mystification of the "other." By creating

learning opportunities that are grounded in attentiveness to the human issues that connect us, the BBB/TLP curriculum tries to break down stereotypes and demystify other cultures than our own in the US.

Additionally, administrators and instructors who deal with learners on a daily basis said they perceive a need for learners to have more access to information on geopolitical events, and to process that information in relation to their own context. They believe that unless adult learners seek information, they probably hear very little about how our government's decisions affect their daily lives. For example, since the war began, federal budgeting allocations have been redirected from education and social services to military, defense, and Homeland Security (White House, 2006). An average adult learner might hear this in passing or process it on an abstract level. But to draw a concrete, albeit indirect connection, organizations such as TLP are forced to scrape for private funding every year as a result of redirection of federal budget allocations. The curriculum highlights these important connections that are frequently not made in mainstream media reporting, much less in the classroom.

The last three stated goals combined implicitly assume that awareness of the issues and treatment of these issues in classroom dialogue will result in more informed, organized, and active voters and community participants. This is clearly aligned with TLP's guiding principles that emphasize critical thinking and democratic community participation (TLP, 2003). Adult learners are citizens, voters, and community members living in a global era. With access to information and the space and time to discuss political issues, TLP's learners may be better able to form an opinion about the issues that affect their lives. They may become better decision makers, voters, and community participants.

TLP's curriculum highlights issues of the impacts of war on education and communities, as themes borrowed from *The Librarian of Basra*. For TLP, compiling and organizing resources to teach about these issues will help learners gain access to information needed in order to form opinions on the issues that affect them. In the introduction to the curriculum it states it uses a "critical literacy approach" (discussed in more detail in Sections 3 and 4.) Consistent with this approach, the curriculum is designed to help instructors and learners generate themes to discuss, teach learners how to locate and analyze that information, and give them space in which to process it, both through dialogue and writing. Contradictory to a critical literacy approach, the curriculum stops short of political action, as if it is an implied answer to a rhetorical question. This reflects TLP's organizational philosophy that embraces working toward social justice issues, as well as its limitations in embodying their philosophy by working towards real political or social changes they believe in. During one interview, the director stated, "we are not there to tell them what to think, but we hope they have some opinion on the issues that affect them, and they do this through access to information" (TLP Director, personal communication, April 2006.)

Curriculum making process: Key decisions

Before I joined the curriculum team, the five units were already outlined and divided between team members. All team members were instructors or administrators of TLP and other local adult education organizations. Eight of the ten team members were women. During the first meeting I attended, the teams were still organizing themselves. I volunteered to work on the Media Literacy unit because it was the smallest and least represented group. The other team member working on this section belonged to another AE organization that was undergoing some chaotic organizational shifting, so she was not able to contribute as much as

she hoped. At this first meeting, the team made significant decisions that shaped the rest of the curriculum making process and the curriculum itself.

1) *Tolerance for differing perspectives, lifestyles, and cultures:* This would be an overarching guideline for the curriculum. Respect for others goes hand-in-hand with self-reflection and critical introspection of one's own worldview. Even though the curriculum does not have to be used in sequence, this unit was highly recommended to start with, to lay the groundwork for respectful dialogue and appreciation of differences.

2) *Media literacy:* This was also a crucial fundamental skill. Understanding how we access information, where it comes from, how we process it are critical skills for media literacy. Recognizing biases in the media and reading beyond print are also necessary skills for critically analyzing information. Media literacy would be another fundamental principle to establish as a foundation before moving on to more content-based units.

3) *Electronic format:* In order to make the curriculum accessible to a wider audience, it is posted on the BBB website (www.booksbuildingbridges.org). This also reduces the need to purchase expensive printed materials and resources.

4) *Pre-developed materials:* Most of the resources included in the curriculum are found on the Internet and are already developed by other organizations. Organizing and compiling already existing resources avoids duplicating lesson plans and materials and saves time for all curriculum makers and instructors involved. Using recommended websites (with readings,

activities, and sometimes lesson plans) allows anyone with access to the Internet to use the curriculum and leaves options open for adaptation to other contexts.

5) *Living document*: The original curriculum posted to the website is just the beginning. It is loosely organized to allow it to be updated, amended, and added to as it is implemented in the classroom. Depending on the context, each instructor will implement and build on the curriculum differently, if he or she chooses to implement it. The process of developing this curriculum relies on instructor as well as learner input. Through an ongoing, collaborative approach, learners and instructors will seek out topics and materials that interest them and that they feel are relevant. The introduction to the curriculum invites any educator or user of the curriculum to add to or amend any of the units.

6) *Literacy/Grade level*: The curriculum materials and resources should aim at literacy levels of around grades six to nine. This reading level is an adequate middle range for adult learners. The resource content should be age-appropriate, meaning that any resources designed for middle school to high school should be adapted and intellectually geared for an adult audience. The language in mid-level literacy materials can also be adjusted for higher or lower literacy levels. The curriculum is open-ended enough to allow flexibility in adjusting materials or activities to diverse age groups or reading levels. This is at the discretion of each teacher, who presumably knows his/her learners' reading levels, as well as what type of material will be interesting for them.

7) *Apolitical*: Although it was clear that every team member was against the war in Iraq, the director stressed again and again the importance of political neutrality. If the content or

presentation appeared too radical or leftist, they would lose the interest of some students, compromise their ideal classroom practice of critical thinking and self-directed learning, and possibly lose favor of their funding base. Hence, there was a push to present the “facts” as objectively as possible, and let the “facts” speak for themselves. Representation of multiple viewpoints was also encouraged. In order to deal with resources that could be seen as biased, they emphasized the objective of unit two, which deals with media literacy and critical thinking. If these critical thinking skills and expectations are well established from the outset, the learners should recognize and challenge those biases in the chosen resources.

Reflections and first impressions

The first time I looked over the curriculum outline, it was clear that the curriculum makers were all of one mind about the war. I was alarmed at its unclouded anti-war message. I was also wondering how the learners would receive it. Growing up, I always understood that teachers were supposed to appear politically neutral in the classroom, and thus I assumed that an ideal curriculum avoided polarized perspectives. My reactions, I suppose, were similar to the instructors’ balking at having to implement the politically charged curriculum (which I discuss in more detail in the next section.)

I also believed there would be much hesitation as well on the part of the learners to want to study the issues it presented, that learner “buy in” would be a challenge. I thought mine was one example of stigmas that curriculum builders hold about adult learners. I wondered if it might also be representative of class and education disparities that play out between educational planners, instructors, and learners. I continued to read and think about this issue of viewpoint representation in AE, and the power that educators in AE, or at least TLP, have in choosing and implementing curricula. Even in TLP classrooms, where the

learners have considerable voice in those key decisions, TLP instructors still admitted there was an imbalance of power that allowed them to have more control over decision making. A few ideas began to formulate in my mind through literature and discussion with people inside and outside of TLP: 1) education is an inherently political endeavor because it involves learning about and dealing with power relations, 2) considering the diversity of learners in the AE classroom, there is no avoiding the collision of political viewpoints, and 3) adult educators should seek out opportunities to engage learners in dialogue about political events that affect their lives.

I drew another conclusion, which is difficult to admit even to myself. Like TLP instructors, I do not agree with the war and I would like others to not agree with it as well. Being in a position where I may be able to generate empathy for Iraqi communities and organize learning opportunities about the harmful effects of the war would be one way to get people to agree with me.

However, I concluded, no matter what perspectives the curriculum supports, its implementation in the classroom offers the opportunity to present, discuss, and hear many viewpoints. A learning environment like TLP is one in which students feel safe to question everything, even the biases of the instructor or material. This is explicitly encouraged through the first two units. The curriculum content, in leaning to one side of the war issues, could be a catalyst for engagement in discussion and debate. Since TLP frequently uses a participatory approach to learning experiences in the classroom, I saw this curriculum as the perfect opportunity for independent and group research projects, for learners to search for their own information and resources to contribute to the class. Thus, the learners would also become participants in the curriculum development process, ensuring that multiple perspectives are represented.

At the first curriculum meeting I attended, I was still sorting out these issues on a philosophical level while there were more practical matters to take on. As I worked on the Media Literacy unit over the next few months, the original unit outline guided my search for resources and materials. My virtual ignorance of who the learners were and the dynamics that shaped their usual learning environment probably carried in to resources I chose for my section. But I took cues from the TLP instructors and administrators I was working with, hoping to learn from them.

I used mostly web resources that provided readings and examples of activities and lesson plans that would encourage independent and group exploration. I looked for resources that would provide open-ended opportunities to adapt to multiple contexts and needs. I was aware that this would be an ongoing, participatory process of curriculum development, and this took the onus off of creating a masterpiece of a final product. I realized that I would probably have the opportunity to engage in the curriculum development even after the curriculum was posted on the website.

Anticipated challenges

Some instructors wondered on a practical level how they would fit the BBB curriculum in to their already packed schedules and still teach literacy and numeracy skills that the learners need. It was seen as an added component, something that would require restructuring of class time to accomplish. Other instructors, aligning with a more participatory classroom approach, simply did not use it because their students, at least for the current class cycle, had not chosen any of the topics covered in the curriculum.

Many of the instructors had concerns about implementing the curriculum, specifically on how to handle classroom dynamics when political issues are brought into the class.

However, the loudest voices during the early phases of curriculum conception were those that were concerned about the politics and implementation. Although they are all highly trained and skilled at their jobs, most instructors felt they could not facilitate a fair debate about the war. They worried that political conflicts would disrupt class dynamics and lead to an unproductive learning environment.

Related to the concern over conflict, abuse of power in the classroom was also a prevalent concern. Although some theories that inform AE practice might suggest otherwise, most instructors are still aware of the imbalance of power between the instructor and learners in the classroom. This power relation is not usually removed by adjusting teaching styles or educational philosophies. Indeed, most people in our society are socialized to accept it (hooks, 1994). Some participants in the workshop readily accepted the notion that they could influence learners' opinions about the war, and some even felt a sense of duty to do so, but such a confession was usually coupled with an apologia for deviating from the role as a responsible adult educator.

The curriculum team discussed the biases in the proposed curriculum, while a contradictory message was explicitly articulated. During the first few curriculum development meetings, the TLP director adamantly emphasized the importance of building an apolitical curriculum on paper, no matter how the individual instructor implemented it in class. The director did not specify reasons for remaining politically neutral; it was implied that this was the only acceptable approach to its design and implementation. Upon further inquiry with the director, I found that remaining politically neutral was foundational to legitimizing the use of the curriculum to the TLP board of directors and to the State, their primary donor.

For me, political neutrality was a curious request, especially in reviewing the content chosen for the curriculum - none of it was very apolitical. If the content were only focused on

the human aspects of war and creating bridges of understanding between cultures, or if alternative resources were included to highlight the right end of the political spectrum, I would consider this an attempt at an apolitical stance, however difficult this would be to achieve in reality. One entire unit focused on negative impacts of the war, and another unit outlined the muddled rationale leading up to the war. While it is difficult to paint any war in a positive light, there is really no neutrality in this curriculum; the message is clearly anti-war. To be fair and inclusive, it relies on learners' feedback - questions and critiques of the material, or requests for material representing other viewpoints. Maybe in practice it will look different, but on paper it cannot be considered apolitical.

These concerns led me to ask several questions about the BBB curriculum project. First, there is a generally accepted notion that adult education is tied directly or indirectly to economic issues on individual or societal levels via employment skills and opportunities. When economics and politics are so tightly intertwined, how is it that educators persist in theoretically separating education from its political context? Conversely, what is the nature of TLP's organizational culture that encourages the politically charged curriculum to be developed and used? What are theoretical precedents that inform TLP's organizational culture, and how do those theories rationalize the use of a politically charged curriculum? And lastly, how do other approaches used in TLP contradict the critical perspective of US politics as portrayed in the curriculum?

Facilitator dialogue training

Many of the curriculum makers who are also instructors expressed concern about handling conflict in the classroom, should it arise. Although they are all highly trained and skilled educators, most instructors felt they could not facilitate a fair debate about the war. They worried that conflicts would disrupt class dynamics and lead to an unproductive learning

environment. Several instructors requested a training workshop on dialogue facilitation skills to answer these concerns. TLP arranged a daylong workshop hosted by a facilitator from the Center for Nonviolent Communication.

Marshall Rosenberg founded this organization and dialogue method that emphasizes moment-to-moment awareness of the way we communicate and the language we use, and whether we are truly aware of the emotional state underneath our words. The website for his organization, The Center for Nonviolent Communication, states that “nonviolent communication guides us to reframe how we express ourselves, how we hear others and resolve conflicts by focusing our consciousness on what we are observing, feeling, needing, and requesting” (CNVC, 2006). According to this method, if we peel away layers of our language and communication style, we uncover our present emotional state, and even farther underneath are basic needs that are or are not being met. These are the fundamental human needs that we all have in common, that connect all people. Awareness that these basic human needs are the source of all human communication and contact leads to a greater sense of empathy and oneness with others. We can connect with the “human spirit in each person [by] interacting with others in a way that allows everyone's needs to be equally valued” (CNVC, 2006.)

We began the workshop by trying to articulate underlying assumptions, expectations, and the agenda of the curriculum, and how those are reflective of the curriculum makers' worldviews, assumptions, and even political agendas. We aired out several issues that created confusion, anxiety, or concern amongst the team members. The educators clarified key terms in the curriculum, such as “tolerance,” “critical thinking,” and “apolitical.” We also discussed paradoxes in the adult learning environment, power relations between learners and instructors, and to what extent the instructor should assert his or her opinions in a political discussion. The

workshop ended with practice dialogue session, in which questions were written on pieces of paper and drawn from a hat. The facilitator modeled and outlined specific steps instructors could follow to facilitate dialogue should political issues spark volatile debates in the classroom.

For me, highlights of the workshop were the debates around the instructor's role in the AE classroom. There was discussion as to how much perceived power instructors have in the adult learning environment, and how much of that power is appropriate to accept and to wield. In adult learning, there is an assumption that power relations are equal, since all participants and instructors come in with life experience and knowledge that is valued equally (Vella, 2002.) Below are some of the concerns the instructors voiced during the workshop:

"Teachers *have* to be neutral."

"...But there is no way that war can be depoliticized."

"Maybe students *want* to know what I think."

"I have a moral obligation to present all sides of an issue."

"...And I have a moral obligation to expose them to the *facts* if they are uninformed or misinformed."

"I am a participant as well. If I conceal my opinion, I am not really participating. This could be a detriment to the group."

Instructors wondered, in a participatory learning process, is the instructor's role to facilitate dialogue amongst the learners and to minimize his/her stance by concealing his/her opinions? Or should the instructor, in attempting to level the playing field in the classroom, assume the role of another learner, and participate equally in the discussion?

The latter option denies that there is an unequal balance of power between the instructor and learners, attempting to mask the instructor's position of authority and power. The former indicates an acceptance of unequal positions of power, and tries to work within that dynamic. For me, accepting that the instructor might wield more power and may potentially abuse it should not preclude the instructor's participation in debates. If the goal is to cultivate learners' critical thinking skills and improve access to information, I believe it is the instructor's responsibility to ask probing questions and to provide information, if he/she has it, which would contribute to a richer understanding of the issues discussed. The instructor may interject with opinions, but cannot presume to know the truth. While encouraging as many viewpoints as are represented by learners in the classroom, instructors should not hope to present every single piece of data or opinion in a very complex situation like the war in Iraq, and should encourage learners to approach each piece of media coverage with a critical eye.

The dialogue facilitation training was productive in that many of the participants voiced honest fears and concerns on implementing the curriculum. They were able to organize their thoughts out loud and realize that many others were feeling the same way. Without exception, everyone who voiced an opinion about the war was against it, but there was considerable diversity in how they perceived they should present those issues in class.

However, as valuable as it was to discuss feelings about the war and the curriculum, I do not believe that the workshop provided the practical dialogue facilitation skills that the instructors were hoping to gain. The trainer talked more about learning "feeling literacy" rather than how to establish an appropriate environment to discuss issues, or how to manage conflict in class discussions. Many instructors afterward felt that important issues had been raised and examined closely, but they still felt inadequately prepared to implement the

politically charged curriculum. There was talk about holding a follow-up training, which so far has not happened.

The next section follows political issues throughout recent history of adult education in the United States. It lays a theoretical groundwork for addressing some of the power imbalance issues that the instructors struggled with in implementing the curriculum. And lastly, the next section outlines some theories that have formed my view of adult education and helped me deconstruct complicated themes that emerged during this project.

Section 3: Educational Frameworks and Approaches

As introduced in the previous section, the political nature of the curriculum unearthed discussions and debates about classroom practices in dealing with politics, as well as the instructors' roles in AE. The curriculum development team anticipated many challenges in implementing a politically charged curriculum in an AE classroom. Charged political issues were not usually dealt with directly in the TLP classroom, but most of the instructors agreed on the curriculum's premise, which was that of creating a space conducive for a deeper understanding and critical inquiry of issues around the war in Iraq. One of their main concerns was that education should be politically neutral, or that they would be seen as abusing their power in the classroom as curriculum builders and instructors. Compounding their anxiety was the adamant request from the director and the board that they keep the curriculum apolitical. While all agreed to forge ahead with the project, two questions loomed over the meetings and training session: what place politics has in the AE classroom? And what is the best way to teach about politics?

Upon taking a closer look at ideas expressed during interviews with TLP workers and during the dialogue facilitation workshop, it is evident that TLP's administrators and instructors are informed by traditional theories and methodologies of education, as well as those of AE. The latter has evolved in some ways that diverge from traditional education, creating at times complementary and other times contradictory thoughts on education, the adult educator's role, and the place of politics in the AE classroom.

Historical backdrop of education: Two educational frameworks

In order to discuss what place politics has in AE, it is necessary to create a historical backdrop of education in the United States, and the trajectory the field of AE has recently followed. In *School and Society*, Feinberg and Soltis (2004) outline two frameworks for viewing public education that are relevant to a discussion on TLP and their politically charged curriculum. The first, functionalism, is the view that education plays a functional role in society, filling needs for credentials, improve employability, and keep up with the changing demands of our economy.

Feinberg and Soltis (2004) state that “much of educational reform has been built on the functionalist view that schools serve to help people adapt to the changing life of modern society” (p. 22.) The formative years of public education in the US coincided with the industrial age of development, with more demand for a literate populous with skills to match the demands of burgeoning industry. Through the lens of this framework, part of education’s role in a modern capitalist society has been as a nonpolitical, objective system to generate rational thinkers and skilled workers.

Within the functionalist framework, another important purpose of education is preparing students to participate in a democratic society. Pinar, et al (1995) consider John Dewey as one of America’s most influential philosopher on education, especially in the context of preparing students to participate in a democracy. Dewey was at the forefront of progressivism, an movement in American education in the early 1900s that attempted to place more emphasis on learning as an integral part of every day life, as opposed to compartmentalized schooling as isolated from daily life. More importantly, he advocated teaching critical thinking and problem solving skills, making the connection between education and participation in a democratic society (Pinar, et al., 1995, pp. 103-108). For the

time, the progressivist movement was somewhat radical in its resistance to rote memorization and other traditional means, advocating for teaching critical thinking. Indeed, Dewey's influence is noted in constructivist movements later on. However, Pinar, et al (1995) consider him a functionalist in that students should be prepared to function as part of existing, presumably satisfactory, economic and social systems.

Education is seen as one institution that is important for the healthy functioning of a democracy, or at least the socialization that will lead to acceptance of the political and social situation as the 'way things are' (Jarvis, 1992, p. 232.) A functionalist approach to education prepares students to survive within and uphold existing social and political structures, assuming that these are adequately beneficial to everyone. Education is also be for the purpose of "serving to socialize students to adapt to the economic, political, and social institutions of that society" (Feinberg and Solits, 2004, p. 6). The role of education as working within already existing social structures legitimizes they way things are.

Functionalism is based on principles such as modernity, individual accountability, meritocracy, and equal access to education for everyone. Thus, the American educational system is thought to give everyone the same opportunity for financial success and personal growth. Underlying this perception is the assumption that equal access to education leads to equal access to material benefits (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004, p. 29.)

Under these assumptions, one could argue that a person's economic conditions and access to resources are inseparable from his or her ability to participate in a democratic society. If a person's daily burden is to struggle for basic needs, according to the functionalist framework, the individual only needs to complete a certain amount of schooling that will give him or her the skills necessary to become upwardly mobile. Since the focus is on the individual contributing to the system in order to benefit from it, if the system does not work

for a person, it is assumed that the person is at fault. The onus then falls on the individual to remedy his or her situation. Feinberg and Soltis question whether, according to the functionalism framework, all individuals are actually able to develop their talents in order to seek opportunities and rewards in a meritocratic society where one is rewarded based on talents or achievements. There are other structural hierarchies, such as race, gender, religion, or physical ability that may hinder an individual's ability to take advantage of and compete within this system. Because equal opportunity to education as well as rewards are held as ideals in our society, many people may confuse this as the way things *should* be with the way things actually *are*. Functionalism may create the illusion of political, social, and economic objectivity.

This critique of functionalism leads to a second educational framework of Feinberg and Soltis. Conflict theory generally includes writers and thinkers who hold that the existing social, economic and political structures within modern capitalist societies do not adequately address the needs of the entire population (Feinberg and Soltis, 2004, p. 7). With roots in a Marxist class analysis, conflict theory is concerned with power dynamics between those who control access to resources and power, and more marginalized populations that do not.

Over the last few decades academic writing about education as a political activity has become more common, and has been dominated by leftist discourses (Pinar, et al, 1995, p. 246.) One of these perspectives within conflict theory is based on Althusser's idea that certain institutions "functioned to subjugate the working class" (Pinar, et al, 1995, p. 246). For Althusser, education is an 'ideological state apparatus' that serves to reproduce and maintain unequal balances of power in existing social, political, and economic structures (Pinar, et al, 1995 p. 246.)

Reproduction theory was also supported by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, in their 1976 book *Schooling in Capitalist America*, also argued that “schools prepare students to enter the current economic system via a correspondence between schools structure and the structure of production” (Pinar, et al, 1995, p. 245). Reproduction theory examines the ways “schools serve the dominant privileged class by providing for the social reproduction of the economic and political status quo in a way that gives the illusion of objectivity, neutrality, and opportunity” (Feinberg and Soltis, 2004, p. 43). Therefore, the dominant discourse (still seen in schools) that each student is responsible for his or her individual achievement and will be rewarded accordingly masks the fact that there are larger structural forces that play out in school and beyond. This is illustrated by a normalized practice of tracking students through an educational system that corresponds to their social positions, thus training them to function within the system as they know it, with limited opportunity for upward economic mobility.

Another wave of conflict theorists with writers such as Henry Giroux (1981) and Michael Apple (1982) responded to reproduction theory calling it a “Discourse of Despair” (Giroux, 1981, as cited by Pinar, et al, 1995, p. 253). They claimed that it “failed to inspire struggle,” ignored dialectical relationships between the individual and larger social systems, and did not account for individual and collective agency, nor in the power of individuals or collectives to incite change. Giroux wrote that reproduction theory

“has prevented left educators from developing a programmatic language in which they can theorize for schools... In our case, a radical imaginary represents a discourse that offers new possibilities for democratic social relations; it traces out linkages between the political and the pedagogical in order to foster the development of counterpublic spheres that seriously engage *with and in* articulations and practices of radical democracy” (Giroux, 1981, as cited by Pinar, et al, 1995, p. 253).

In *Teachers as Intellectuals* (1988), Giroux makes the case for the role of teachers as agents of social change, focusing on relationships between schooling and democracy, and

between knowledge and power. He encourages teachers to use the classroom to find possibility for social and political change by teaching students to be critical of current social structures, and by practicing “radical democracy” in the classroom in order to carry it out to wider spheres. Giroux is one of the more prolific writers in an educational field that has developed since the late 1960s called critical pedagogy, or critical literacy. More about this approach will follow in more detail at the end of this section.

Michael Apple (1982), in what was at the time a largely male-dominated field, was one of the first theorists to use a feminist analysis as a subset of resistance theory. He argued for the “utter import of gendered labor as a constitutive aspect of the way management and the state have approached teaching and curricular control. It is the absent presence behind all our work” (as cited by Pinar, et al, 1995, p. 265). Unlike Giroux, he did not completely reject reproduction theory. Instead, he claimed that educators and educational theorists must move through reproduction theory as an antecedent to resistance theory, in that it helps people understand how oppressive structures work and exactly what they are resisting in order to become politically conscious and active.

Most conflict theorists would argue that school could be a venue for fostering critical thinking and social change. Most forms of schooling encourage critical thinking and problem solving, but most do not go to the extent to question taken-for-granted social and political structures that maintain imbalances of resources and power. While these writers and thinkers theorized on mass public schooling and its relationship to politics, culture, and the economy, the field of AE evolved semi-independently, springing from a mosaic of practices and theories. Both the functional and conflict theory frameworks inform much of AE and adult learning theory.

Theory and practice in Adult Education

AE is a broad field including workforce development training, basic literacy, continuing education, and many other sub-fields. Therefore, the typical AE organization or practice is difficult to define, but there are some generalities that span across most of the field. AE is not usually included as an integral part of public education systems that are governed entirely by federal or state funding and legislations. AE organizations can be run by privately funded institutions, non-profits, the state, or a combination of the above.

According to Knowles (1978), the practice of teaching adults, or andragogy, differs from childhood education, or pedagogy, in a few ways. Primarily, adults have the psychological need to be independent. Some theorists (such as Tough, 1967, and Knowles, 1975) claim that adults frequently prefer to engage in more self-directed learning, by setting their own goals, shaping their own learning experience, and assessing their own progress. They also have a vast pool of life experience to draw from as both a resource and a base for learning. Andragogy assumes that adults in a learning environment will make their own mature, informed decisions about what they need or want to learn and what is the best way for them to learn.

Finding roots that trace back to John Dewey's writings, AE practice generally situates the learner in the broader context in which learning opportunities are generated from and integrated into "real life", not isolated from it as is more characteristic of traditional, public education (also see Knowles, 1978, and Wenger, 1996). Adult learners are considered more relevancy-orientated and practice-oriented, meaning the learner's interest in any given subject is related to how relevant and practical the topics are in the adult's daily life. These are a few ways in which andragogical methods used in the AE learning environment may vary slightly from pedagogical methods used in traditional childhood schooling.

A person's motivations for re-entering the learning environment as an adult can originate from needs based on adult roles and responsibilities, so there are countless motivations for adults who participate in ABE programs. Cyril Houle (1992) cites numerous studies that address the question of why adults return to educational spheres, but did not come up with any single result or explanation, as reasons varied so widely. His studies cited material advantage, social gain, credentials, learning for learning's sake, and so on.

That said, the demographics of adult learners in adult basic education programs show that an overwhelming majority come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. D'Amico's 2003 findings from data gathering of state-run programs and national surveys show an "integral relationship between social class, as indicated by income and earning capacity, and likelihood of literacy" (D'Amico, p. 21). Many adult learners have low literacy skills, many do not have a high school diploma, and many do not have adequate English language skills, any of which could be factors that limit their opportunities for material gain. These adult learners have not benefited previously from traditional, public school systems – the same school systems that are intended to provide equal opportunities to develop talents and skills and lead to equal access to rewards and resources (as per the functional theory of education.)

Vella (2002) claims that because many adults enter learning environments with significant life experience dealing with social and economic inequalities, adult education practice is often oriented toward generating knowledge and skills that can be used to empower learners to deal with personal, social, economic, and political challenges they face in their larger context. This creates a holistic approach to education, addressing specific needs, interests, and concerns of the learners. Instructors can draw from adult learners' wealth of life

experience and knowledge as both a resource and a base for learning. The instructor should recognize and refer to learners' life experience in organizing learning opportunities.

As part of what Virginia Sauvé (2001) calls participatory learning in AE, learner-centered dialogue enables "a group of people to name *their* world, recognize their potential to create experience, and begin working to fulfill that potential, as individuals and communities. It is learning to see new, more life-giving choices and developing the confidence and skills to act on them" (in Campbell & Burnaby, p. 17). Participatory education relies on Freirian methods (1970) such as "generative themes," where learners take an active role in determining what is taught and how it is taught.

Although Paulo Freire's work and writing was specific to his context of community development and adult literacy in Latin America, his methods have influenced North American AE theory and practices. His work centers on "socialist principles of equality and justice, with the goal of building a new, more humane, democratic, and just society... [using] a dialectical, collective process of sharing, analysis, and action" (Campbell, 2001, p. 2).

The critical literacy approach

Participatory practice is one part of a broader educational method called critical literacy (a term interchangeable with critical pedagogy), an educational methodology that received its name from its close relation to the Frankfurt School's critical theory. Critical literacy finds its roots in a conflict theory framework, passing through reproduction (Althusser, Bowles and Gintis) and resistance theories (Giroux, Freire) within that framework. Critical literacy uses a Marxist lens to analyze education's role in society. It emphasizes the power of education to either maintain or transform larger structural forces, and its potential role in building a more just and democratic society.

Campano, Laman, Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) outline four dimensions defining critical literacy: “1) disrupting the commonplace, 2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, 3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and 4) taking action and promoting social justice. These four dimensions...are interrelated – none stand alone.” These dimensions converge using multiple, sometimes conflicting perspectives that may be represented in the class in order to examine every day language and cultural symbols through a new lens. Thus, critical literacy looks at how language “shapes identity, constructs cultural discourses, and supports or disrupts the status quo” (Fairclough, 1989, and Gee, 1990, as cited by Campano, et al, 2002, p. 382). Critical literacy uses the study of language and culture to increase “opportunities for subordinate groups to participate in society and as an ongoing act of consciousness and resistance” (Giroux, 1993, as cited by Campano, et al, 2002, p. 383), and to “take informed action against oppression through *praxis* (Freire, 1972, as cited by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys, 2002, p. 383).

A central goal of critical literacy is to explore and challenge power relations on different levels: individual, classroom, and larger structural categories that influence identity and class dynamics such as race, class, and gender. In practice, these approaches may still employ mechanical aspects of literacy in reading and writing texts, but much of the process is centered on group participation and discussion and generating meaning from texts. Through this dialogical process, learners may be able to address some of these issues and begin to change their situation through *praxis* - collective dialogue, reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (Freire, 1970).

When educators and learners work together in with equal balance of power within the learning environment, this allows for critical literacy to take place. Critical literacy is “learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience

as historically constructed within specific power relations” (Anderson and Irvine, as cited by Shor, 1999, p. 82). Through interpreting and manipulating texts and placing it in context of their lives, learners situate themselves in their context as subjects of their own existence, and not as objects determined by their circumstance.

Conclusion

A basic understanding of functional and conflict theory frameworks has helped me discuss and analyze the curriculum building process in TLP. In relation to the realm of AE, education in the functionalist narrative does not usually question larger, taken-for-granted structures that factor in to a learner’s daily existence, but it may help address their immediate concerns (i.e., getting a better paying job.) On the other hand, using the lens of conflict theory through the practice of critical literacy can critique political, social economic institutions that do not benefit all people equally. This seems an appropriate approach for educators in AE to use when navigating their role or arranging learning opportunities around political issues.

Implementing the curriculum with the awareness of different theoretical frameworks can help instructors explore the best means for introducing politically charged content in the curriculum. The critical literacy approach helps instructors examine their own assumptions and think critically about power relations inherent in the teacher/student relations. It also creates an awareness about challenges adult learners face in daily life and factors in his or her background that may hinder his or her ability to compete or gain access to equal learning opportunities and job opportunities in our society (i.e., race, class, gender, religion.) To present this curriculum to the TLP class without these insights and without these critiques would be to ignore power dynamics on many levels, to disregard the role of larger power structures at play, and to possibly overlook learners’ agency to critique and act on new

knowledge generated. The next section situates TLP and the new BBB/TLP curriculum within these educational frameworks and AE theories, and discusses the possibility of using a critical literacy approach when implementing this curriculum.

Section 4: Addressing Politics and Power in the TLP Context

Situating TLP practice in AE theory

How is TLP situated within the two educational frameworks discussed earlier, and in relation to general AE theory in practice? What are the implications of using AE theory, specifically critical literacy, when implementing the BBB/TLP curriculum? From my observations and interactions with learners and TLP workers, TLP does not function within one specific framework, nor does it employ just one AE methodology. As it is generally with AE programs, TLP's website makes it clear that their classes attempt to incorporate knowledge and skills that are relevant to learners' economic, social, and political contexts. Learning opportunities in TLP help learners acquire knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are practical and necessary to their daily lives, helping them work toward improving some aspects of their lives through education. TLP also provides opportunities for learners to engage in leadership workshops, community outreach, and civic education projects (as discussed in Section 1.)

The functionalist framework echoes across TLP's website and in the classrooms. Preparing skilled workers to fill needs of the economy is a large part of how TLP promotes the "need for adult education" on their website. On this web page, each of the four points covered present economics-related problems that AE can help address (TLP, 2003), but isolates these from political and cultural factors within the same context. This may be reflective of the functionalist framework, which sees education as a politically neutral tool that, as Feinberg and Soltis state, "serves to further the survival of the social system as a whole" (2004, p. 15).

If one fundamental purpose driving education has been to prepare learners for roles in a capitalist industrial economy (Feinberg and Soltis, 2004, p. 6), those educational demands

are changing as emphasis in our economy shifts away from industry, towards service sectors and information-based work. More jobs require handling information and technology, so skills needed for the workplace are shifting emphasis in time with our economy.

TLP's regular classroom practices include using education as a tool for improving livelihood, such as the "life skills" component of the general education class at PVAEC. While helping to improve chances of upward mobility for learners is a worthwhile undertaking, at times this can overshadow a necessary critique of the "way things work" in the world, upholding general assent and legitimizing institutions and social structures that do not serve everyone equally (as seen in Feinberg and Soltis's critique on functional theory, pp. 29-40). Helping instructors incorporate a more critical analysis of the role of education within a modern capitalist society and a democracy may be just as beneficial to the learning environment and the learners, as helping them cope within the existing system.

That said, issues around social justice and real democracy hover just below the surface at TLP. Conversations with the instructors mirror language on TLP's website, which is sprinkled with references that indicate a commitment to active community participation, democratic values, and social justice (TLP, 2003.) TLP incorporates learner-centered, participatory learning practices, usually associated with Freire's (1970) dialogical methods for creating social and political awareness. One example of this is seen in the adult education class at PVAEC, where learners actively help create a broad-based, flexible curriculum. Learners often choose what they will study individually and during group sessions, depending on their own interests in research projects or other subjects they feel they need to improve.

TLP workers are conscious of their learners' roles as voting citizens in a democracy who may take part in some decision-making. Most political decisions affect public institutions

and access to goods and services and either hurt or help marginalized populations. This is evident in the example described in Part 2 where students engaged in a lengthy learning process about public transport that culminated in petitioning for more local public transport services in their rural area. Active participation in a democracy follows the need to be informed of the issues of policies in the realm of public debate. Let me state a few examples of political issues that are included in the BBB/TLP curriculum - issues that greatly impact a learner's every day life, and that may be examined in the TLP classroom.

Making the political personal in TLP

The availability and quality of services for adult learners depends partly on budgeting allocations. TLP receives over half of their funding from the Massachusetts Department of Education. The TLP administrators must apply for this funding and are granted it depending on accountability, need, and availability of funds. The House Committee on Education and the Workforce published a 2006 study critiquing the current administration's freezing and slashing of federal funding for adult basic education, stating that programs nationwide "already have long wait lists and budgets that only allow them to serve 3% of adults with basic or below basic literacy skills." Federal discretionary funds for education and related public service programs are being cut. In fact, for the 2007 fiscal year, the current administration has proposed to cut Even Start programs entirely (COABE, 2006). TLP has partnered with Even Start in a few sites to offer a free program that couples childcare with literacy for parents.

Reducing accessibility to social services is happening simultaneously as budgets for defense, foreign aid, and Homeland Security have increased 41% since 2001 (White House, 2006). Most of the TLP workers I spoke with believed strongly that AE budget cuts and

increased defense spending are not unrelated; that funds have been diverted from education and other discretionary spending to increase defense spending. This is one issue that appears as a whole sub-section in the BBB/TLP curriculum, meant for interrogation in TLP classrooms by people who are disproportionately affected.

As mentioned earlier, learners in AE usually come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. D'Amico's study (2003) finds that single mothers, African-Americans and Latinos tend to be disproportionately over-represented in economically disadvantaged populations in the US and in adult education populations nationwide (p. 22.) Western Massachusetts is no exception to these tendencies. Matching the nation-wide numbers, women constitute about 60% of the adult learners in Western Massachusetts and TLP (TLP, 2003; MCAE, 2004). While only 7% of the population in the area of Massachusetts served by TLP is Caucasian, about 20% of TLP learners are of minority groups, representing a higher proportion compared to the overall population (TLP, 2003).

Although about 15-20% of the current adult learners at TLP are non-native speakers of English (TLP, 2003), there are little to no ESL services offered in TLP. These learners, who may be able to read and write in their native language, are placed into classes with learners at the beginning literacy level in English. TLP administrators do not believe that this is an ideal arrangement and have adapted some of their classes to better suit fully literate adult learners who only need ESL services (Paju, L., personal communication, November 2004). Throughout the state of Massachusetts, wait lists for ESL classes can last six months to two years (MAEC, 2005).

In Massachusetts, more than half (51%) of potential adult learners who attempt to enroll in literacy or adult education classes can not, due to long wait lists (MAEC, 2005). TLP offers a wide variety of services and classes across the western part of the state, but they are

still struggling for funding, and there is still more need for services and a limited capacity to provide those services. These data illustrate over-represented populations in TLP classes in Massachusetts coupled with inaccessibility of services to meet their needs. Less access to education services points to unequal access to resources and power for those groups, a phenomenon that, according to the functionalist framework, does not or should not happen in educational systems based on equal opportunity for all.

Adults who need programs such as basic literacy, ESL, GED and Even Start may be concerned about political decisions that affect them, directly or indirectly. TLP purports to help learners “participate more equitably in the social, cultural, economic, and political lives of their communities” (TLP, 2003), and the BBB/TLP curriculum specifically addresses some of these issues that learners could be well informed of as community members, voting citizens, and taxpayers.

Considering the AE demographics and the challenges posed to AE organizations, TLP instructors can not afford to treat education as a politically neutral undertaking. However, the functionalist narrative tells them their job is just to help learners become upwardly mobile, and help them escape the cycle of poverty through gaining education and skills. Helping learners deal with immediate material concerns is no doubt an important part of their role as instructors. However, instructors may also make information available to learners and help learners analyze and possibly act on larger structural issues that create those material conditions.

These two competing narratives about education’s role in our society, and by extension, the educator’s role in the classroom, may leave some of them confused about how to deal with political issues in class. As a program partially funded by the state, they may have added pressure as civil servants to not ‘impose’ their individual political views on learners.

While this paper does not prove that conflicting stories about perceived good and ethical practices in the AE classroom really affect instructors, it suggests possible explanations as to why they may have been hesitant to implement a politically charged curriculum. Parts of the BBB/TLP curriculum explicitly address relevant political issues such as how their taxes are being spent by elected officials and the state.

An AE environment like TLP's is innately political because it can encourage critical dialogue around various roles and responsibilities that adults take on, many of which are tied to local economy and politics (see section 2 for examples on TLP encouraging civic participation.) Some of TLP's classroom practices, such as those that use a participatory approach, help situate the learner in a larger context and may encourage a critical inspection of generally accepted norms and reality. TLP's organizational culture emphasizes that learning does not take place in a vacuum, and that larger structural forces must be critically examined. Because it creates learning opportunities based on issues in the learners' daily lives in their wider context, TLP is a conducive milieu for integrating politics and education. Being semi-independent of the publicly funded statewide system of education also frees them from some of the expectations normally imposed on teachers in public school systems. This was one factor that enabled TLP to join the BBB collective and to develop this curriculum.

Trepidation about their roles as curriculum makers and instructors in a participatory learning environment, as well as concern over the possibility of abusing their power in the classroom, show that TLP already think seriously and critically about AE and their role in it. The methodology and theory behind critical literacy, discussed below, may be adequate for further discussion on the intersection of politics and education. It may also suggest one method the instructors can use to implement the curriculum while addressing instructor/learner power imbalances inherent in any learning environment.

Using critical literacy to implement the BBB/TLP curriculum

How can TLP instructors and curriculum makers use adult education theory to inform the implementation of the politically charged curriculum? Two major challenges that instructors anticipated with implementing the curriculum were how to go about facilitating dialogue and providing a meaningful learning experience about issues around the war in Iraq. TLP uses a participatory approach in the classroom, which could be used as a building block for incorporating critical literacy to specifically address the political content of the curriculum as well as power relations between instructors and learners. An examination of the critical literacy approach in relation to the BBB/TLP curriculum and the instructor/learner relationship might be helpful for sorting out some of these issues. It can also help to examine some ways the curriculum can help fulfill TLP's overarching goal for helping learners "participate more equitably in social, cultural, economic *and political* lives of their communities" (TLP, 2003, my emphasis).

The introduction to the BBB/TLP curriculum states that one of its overarching goals is critical literacy (BBB, 2005). In some ways, it fulfills this goal and in other ways not. Critical literacy practices begin on a very personal level, dealing with factors that constitute each individual's identity, such as race, class, gender, religion, etc. Using small group discussions to address these issues supposedly breaks down barriers and creates an atmosphere that is more conducive to honest dialogue, also opening discussion about stereotypes, racism, etc. Branching out from the personal, the dialogical process creates group connections and solidarity. "Problem posing," another Freirian method (1970), prompts learners to ask questions and examine issues in their every day lives as related to outside forces. This connects the learners to their historical context, which is meant to increase awareness of either

positive or oppressive structural forces in their lives. This can potentially build a sense of shared burdens and ignite a collective search for solutions.

Aligning with the critical literacy approach, the BBB/TLP curriculum begins by addressing the learners' immediate contexts and identity issues. This is important groundwork to lay for the remaining content of the curriculum, as some issues that emerge in discussions about the war may be intensely personal (i.e., having a relative in Iraq) while others will seem too remote. A critical literacy approach helps uncover the ways that seemingly irrelevant issues may be connected to each individual or group.

The BBB/TLP curriculum opens dialogue around the war, and can also begin dialogue on other issues that at first glance may not seem relevant to learners, but in fact are. Part of this curriculum, in line with critical literacy practices, is helping learners critically examine accepted norms and realities. During one class observation, I spoke with a young woman who had just finished presenting her independent study project about women in Iraq (an example of self-directed learning.) When I asked her opinion on the project in general, she answered, "it's interesting, but what does it have to do with me?" I observed another class that seemed entirely unengaged in the curriculum content, with several students making comments such as, "do we have to do this Iraq stuff again?" This raised questions for me about learner motivation and interest, and whether it made a difference what approach was used in planning and implementing the curriculum.

Critical literacy relies somewhat on what TLP calls "generative themes," which is learner input on what they will study either individually or as a group. This practice may have benefits and drawbacks in relation to the BBB/TLP curriculum. My concerns are over the polar extremes - when the instructor decides to implement only the themes that learners have shown an interest in, or only those the instructor believes the learners need to know.

Although it seems apparent from the data shown above that political issues are linked to adult learners' access to education and resources, the instructors cannot assume that all learners will be interested in related political issues around the war in Iraq. Neither can they presume that none will be interested. According to TLP's usual practices, learners participate actively in deciding what to study. This tension between the instructor's assumptions about the learners and their needs, and the learners' articulated needs and interests in the classroom might have also been a factor in each instructor's hesitation to implement the curriculum in his or her classroom.

Instructors or other educators in positions of power (curriculum makers, planners, administrators) may make assumptions about the learners, and make decisions and arrange learning opportunities around those perceived needs or interests (Vella, 2002). During an interview, one TLP worker echoed the opinion that several others had alluded to during the training workshop when she informed me that the average adult learner in TLP is "handicapped" in the sense that they do not regularly access "good" media sources to retrieve information about the world, and thus need to be helped along (TLP worker, personal communication, April 2006).

This may be the case, but for me, this comment spoke to the need for instructors and curriculum makers to inspect their own assumptions about the learners. They should not presume to know the learners' needs and interests, but rather take deliberate measures to find out. This entails not only the clichéd 'starting where they're at,' but also digging a little deeper to ask learners to examine and question their own perspectives. Implementation of TLP's curriculum requires a balance between awareness of learners' needs and interests, and sensitivity in introducing political, social, and economic issues that the learners may not have

expressed interest in studying. It also requires introspection of biases on the part of the curriculum makers/instructors involved.

For an instructor, maintaining an equal balance of power in a participatory learning environment may be challenging, as many instructors simply teach the way they were taught, accepting and embodying the role of an authority or expert. Other instructors overcompensate for this by *only* implementing lessons that the learners have shown an interest in. Leveling the playing field in the classroom means to some instructors that they should ignore or neglect some issues just because learners have never shown an interest in them. I found that many TLP instructors have simply chosen not to use the curriculum because the learners have not shown an interest in studying its contents.

Freire's problem posing (1970) has instructors raising questions and prompting pre-planned discussion on issues, sometimes regardless of expressed learner interest. In the same vein, Freire would consider it irresponsible to exclude topics of study simply because learners have not requested them. Shor (1999) explains Freire's view of authority's place in the dialogical process as "neither permissive nor agnostic... conceptual knowledge of the teacher was not denied but rather posed as a necessary element." Wielding too much power in the classroom can destroy the two-way communication essential to critical literacy, so the problem becomes "how and when a teacher should use authority and expertise to promote rather than silence student agency." Shor follows this thought with the claim that "in some cases, the lack of authority interferes with a teacher's ability to initiate a critical and power-sharing process" (p. 13). Hence, not engaging in subjects that do not seem interesting to the learners can be a disservice to them. It would be folly for an instructor to completely disregard the ways he or she is an expert, or to withhold information or ideas because of lack of interest on the learners' part.

On the other hand, an instructor must tread lightly in making decisions about what is taught and how it is taught. Too much wielding of power and authority in decision-making can result in disempowering adult learners who many times are already experiencing oppression from authority or social structures in their every day lives. As Nesbit (1998) explains, “radical educators regard the world and its constituent societies as full of contradictions and marked by imbalances of power and privilege. Hence, they regard such problems as poverty or illiteracy neither as isolated incidents nor as manifestations of individual inadequacy, but as results of larger social issues. Furthermore, individuals, as social actors, both create and are created by their social worlds” (Nesbit, 1998, as cited by Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p. 347). The learning environment has the potential to be a place where instructors and learners practice shifting the balance of power toward the powerless.

Thus, finding that balance is a matter of reconciling the instructor’s role in the classroom and legitimizing learners’ needs and interests. If, in participatory education, learners share knowledge and ideas, and the power dynamics are shifted so that the instructor wields less power than in traditional education, the instructor’s role is similar to that of the other participants. He or she not only has the opportunity to share knowledge and ideas, but has the responsibility to do so as a participant. During the dialogue facilitation training (described in Section 2), instructors voiced similar views on their role and use of power in the classroom. One of these stated, “in the adult education environment, am I not a participant? Do I not have the right to influence decisions in the class?” Another instructor said, “I actually have the obligation to share my ideas with the learners, especially if I feel there is misinformation about the war. Withholding that is just wrong.” Looking at this comment

through the perspective of traditional education where the instructor makes all the decisions about materials and lessons, it might look like an inappropriate use of power.

Some instructors based their decision to implement the curriculum on their own strong anti-war sentiments. If one tenant of critical literacy centers on listening to many voices and multiple perspectives, how does an instructor go about implementing the curriculum in accordance to the four dimensions of critical literacy? This involves allowing many perspectives to be articulated and examined in discussion or projects, without weighing in heavily with their own convictions. Even if they are using lessons that are based on less controversial topics such as geography, they still need to emphasize, appreciate, and encourage differences. Instructors can be mindful about their role by negotiating a balance between teaching as an authority figure and primary decision-maker in the classroom, versus participating as an equal and relying on learners to determine the curriculum based solely on their self-identified needs and interests. Leaning too far to one end of the continuum or the other can result in an unproductive learning environment for adults. For example, in the case of the young woman who wondered what the subject of her research project had to do with her life, the instructor let her choose her own topic for independent research, but was not instrumental in helping the learner make a connection between the subject of her studies and her own reality.

Critique of the BBB/TLP curriculum

The curriculum offers plenty of resources and suggested activities for teaching and learning, and affords ample opportunity to amend, adapt, or add resources in a continual process of participatory curriculum development. This could include learner-generated materials and subjects identified as interests or needs. However, resources available on how resources could be used are almost nonexistent. In other words, there is plenty of knowing

what, and not enough knowing *how*. As the curriculum makers indicated after the dialogue facilitation workshop, they felt they needed more practice and know-how in teaching and discussing social and political problems in class. At the time I write this, they still have not returned for further training as they had requested.

Additionally, in contradiction to its introduction, the BBB/TLP curriculum does not wholeheartedly embrace a critical literacy approach. One central aim of critical literacy is *praxis* (Freire, 1970), which includes a continuous cycle of dialogue, reflection and action. Action is a crucial component of critical literacy, as it is ultimately intended to invoke larger structural change, beginning with the individual and small communities. However, making the leap from focus on reflection and group dialogue to political awareness and action is an enormous undertaking, so it is no wonder that this expectation caused some level of anxiety with the instructors.

Yet the curriculum does not organize any learning experiences that will encourage TLP classes to act on new knowledge and organize politically around issues (and possibly for legal and ethical reasons probably can not do so.) The curriculum, under the mandated political neutrality, has tried to mask its anti-war biases, and thus has only succeeded in diluting what they hoped would be a radical step towards grass-roots education and organizing. Based on my research on critical literacy, the BBB/TLP curriculum makers can not claim critical literacy as one of their main goals for the curriculum if it does not provoke a sense of urgency to take action on the issues presented. Relatedly, my concern is that non-action leads to an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and cynicism. This was evident in most classes I observed, and especially in one class where all learners agreed with one woman who said, "why does it matter if we form opinions? I don't think my opinion matters."

Lastly, as mentioned in Section 3, a gender perspective was glaringly absent in the BBB/TLP curriculum. Silenced areas in the curriculum may be reflective of silenced populations in the class, which directly contradicts critical literacy practice in inclusiveness, empowerment, examination of multiple perspectives, and questioning of existing power structures. The next section will specifically address a rationale for including resources in each section of the curriculum that address respective themes through a feminist perspective.

Section 5: Incorporating a Feminist Perspective in the Curriculum

The questions the curriculum raised about introducing political issues in the AE classroom and the power relations involved in this process proved particularly thought provoking when I reflected on the ways in which women as learners in TLP are uniquely affected. While examining the BBB/TLP curriculum, I found an alarming lack of organized learning opportunities on gender issues. Gender issues had not emerged even when most people on the curriculum making team were women, over half the learners are women, and many of the issues addressed in the curriculum could apply specifically or uniquely to women. The curriculum mainly focuses on geography, history, politics, media, and military, stereotypically male-dominated spheres. The noticeable absence of a feminist perspective led me to wonder how it may (or may not) be beneficial to the overall curriculum to incorporate a few resources that speak specifically to gender issues relevant to each section.

According to some feminist educators (such as Miller, 2003; Tisdell, 2000), a critical examination of materials or methods for AE might begin by asking how it is meeting needs of the learners. D'Amico (2003) states that "adult basic education serves primarily those individuals likely to have had restricted access to opportunity and power, not only because of their socioeconomic class but also because of the dynamics of racism and sexism in our society" (p. 17). Merriam and Caffarella (1999) have a similar perspective in writing about the intricate web of power relations in the AE environment, in that "it is not possible to talk about racism, classism, sexism, and other "isms" without reference to power and oppression; nor can power be considered apart from issues surrounding knowledge construction" (p. 342).

The lens of conflict theory can bring to the forefront of a discussion on AE the inequities of class and power inside and outside the classroom. Building on this perspective, feminist theory can highlight discussions on the ways in which gender, as it intersects with

class and race issues, creates learners who are or are not in positions of power, and accordingly have experienced limited access to education and resources. For Merriam and Brockett (1997), critical literacy/critical pedagogy is compatible in many ways with a feminist perspective in AE, because “the central theme of critical pedagogy is that for true learning to take place, it is necessary to ensure that the voices of those people who have traditionally been marginalized due to race, sex or lifestyle factors are fully engaged in the learning process” (p. 157). Although there are multiple dimensions to consider as factors in AE, a feminist perspective is one relevant starting point in AE planning and practice.

Feminist pedagogy is a women-centered educational practice. Tisdell (2000) defines feminist pedagogy as “the interactive process of teaching and learning, particularly in relation to what facilitates women’s learning. It is about recognizing the gendered nature of human experience in stories, both in personal narratives (women’s and men’s) and in public stories (as in history books or academic curricula)” (p. 155). Tisdell’s definition of feminist pedagogy includes possibilities for individual as well as social transformation, first by “attempting to expand consciousness, capacity for voice, and self-esteem” and then encouraging learners to become “actors in the world through...public policy discussions that keep the interests of women in mind” (p. 155).

In this section, I argue that a critical literacy approach is an effective method for implementing the BBB/TLP curriculum, but it can be enhanced with feminist pedagogy. Because both forms of pedagogy share the goals of transforming oppressive power structures in our society and emphasizing the connection between reflection and action, they are both aligned with the overarching goals of the curriculum. Through the critical literacy and feminist pedagogy approaches, women as adult learners in TLP classrooms can use the learning environment to explore issues relevant to their lives and “come to voice,” (hooks,

1994). This can potentially lead to personal transformation, shift the balance of power in the classroom, and possibly even encourage learners to engage in social movements outside of class. Here I discuss some of the ways critical literacy and feminist pedagogy complement and contradict each other, while maintaining that incorporating a gender perspective in the BBB/TLP curriculum is necessary for achieving its goals (tolerance, an awareness of global issues, and civil discourse, for example.)

A gender perspective

I chose to examine this curriculum with a gender lens because not only am I concerned with women's position in our culture, I am attracted to the possibility of changing social inequities by changing how education, specifically AE, works as one social mechanism for building, changing, or maintaining existing structures. My stance on gender is as a socially constructed phenomenon that affects how a person perceives and interacts in the world. Gender is but one aspect of a person's identity that composes him or herself as a living, learning human being. Society neither forms gender, nor is it entirely a construction of individual agents. I challenge the biologically determined, polarized perspective of gender, as does Connell (2002) when he states that "being a man or a woman...is not a fixed state. It is a becoming, a condition actively under construction" (p. 4). People are usually born as a man or woman in a biologically determined state, but how a person chooses to respond to biology, as well as cultural expectations, is not predetermined. Behaviors and attitudes are not causally related to anatomy; people can take an active role in constructing their gender identity. In other words, women and men do not form their identities as gendered beings by simply reacting to outside forces; they actively construct their own gender identities through a

dialogical interaction with their social surroundings. This can sometimes result in ambiguous, fluid, and complex identities.

In this section, “gender” is not used as a code word for “women.” For me, “gender issues” are those issues that affect men *and* women, but in different ways because of set social expectations and relations. I focus more on women’s issues because these have traditionally been overlooked (as in the case of this curriculum) or silenced. By focusing on women’s issues, I do not underestimate the importance of men rethinking their roles or expectations in our society. Discussing gender in terms of women’s issues implies that those issues more relevant to men can be examined as well, from the other side of the gender coin. The BBB/TLP curriculum calls for more discussion on those gender issues that affect women, as women constitute the majority of learners and instructors in TLP and may benefit from examining issues more immediately relevant to their own experiences. Thus, I highlight topics that women learners may find more relevant to their lives, and call for more emphasis on critical and feminist pedagogies in implementing the curriculum. My ultimate concern is of leveling the playing field, at least beginning to do so with the TLP classroom.

Feminist theories and feminist pedagogies

As explained in Sections 3 and 4, critical literacy, as an educational offshoot of critical theory, analyzes power relationships in economic and social structures. The central aim of critical literacy is to ensure that historically marginalized people (due to race, gender, lifestyle) are fully engaged in the learning and political processes (D’Amico, 2003). Feminist theory also focuses on “interlocks systems of sex, race, and class in analyzing assumptions and power relationships that serve to oppress and control women” (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 44). Therefore, feminist theory does not usually claim that gender oppression has

more impact than economic or racial oppression. Instead, there are interlocking systems of oppression, of which gender is one.

Hayes and Flannery (2000) generalize feminist theories into three “artificially neat and static distinctions” (p. 10). First, psychological feminist theories that examine gender role socialization, with an “underlying political liberal perspective that seeks to achieve equality for women and men within the existing social order” (p. 11). Psychological feminist theory might emphasize education as a means for personal growth, fulfillment, and transformation. Learning and growth might take place on a more individual, internal level. Second, structural feminist theories try to understand how social structures such as patriarchy and capitalism affect women. It may look at how groups of women are affected given other experiences such as racial and economic oppression. Structural feminism may see power relations as a central factor to a woman’s development and learning experiences. And third, poststructural feminist theories “place emphasis on understanding the intersections of multiple systems of oppression and privilege...[with] attention to individual resistance and agency in the face of oppressive social forces” (p. 13). Rather than focusing on broad systems of oppression or one or two forms of oppression, Poststructural feminism looks at individual and collective resistance. It pays special attention to the role of language – whether overt or unconscious - in constructing knowledge and reality.

Critical theory and feminist theories inform pedagogies in adult education. The two are tightly intertwined, but differ in a few ways. Part of the challenge of trying to define feminist theory and pedagogy is that they have both been so fragmented, both in academia and in practice (Tisdell, 2000). Therefore, I can only offer very generalized descriptions, and instead of “feminist pedagogy,” as in one monolithic educational practice, I refer to it as “feminist pedagogies.” Maher (1987) places feminist pedagogies into two general

perspectives, mirroring feminist theories. There are those that focus on reciprocal relationships between social structures and groups to explain how women (for example) as a group came to be marginalized, and those that focus on individuals, their position(s) of power (or lack thereof), and how they may transform themselves on personal, psychological levels. Both of these focus on power and oppression – the former from a collectivist standpoint, and the latter from an individualist standpoint.

Feminist pedagogies have in common the recognition of the gendered nature of human experience. As Hayes and Flannery (2000) pointed out, feminist pedagogies respond to and try to rectify the notion that traditional forms of education focus on and serve needs of mainly male populations. Both critical and feminist pedagogies examine imbalances of power in social structures and possible ways the individual and groups can exercise agency and alter power relations (p. 157).

Hayes and Flannery (2000) use a post-structuralist, post-modernist approach to feminist pedagogy in order to challenge the “hegemony of adult learning theory” that paints a static, universal, one-dimensional picture of adults as learners. In their “kaleidoscope” model, they describe women’s and men’s lives and identities as both similar and different according to multiple social markers such as race, class, and gender. They argue that previous feminist theories that focused too much on differences between men and women learners (such as in *Women’s Ways of Learning* by Belenky, et al, 1986) have historically fragmented feminist movements, and upheld normalized hierarchies. Yet they argue that we can acknowledge, respect, and appreciate differences without reinforcing those hierarchies. Hayes and Flannery provide an adequate model for incorporating multiple, diverse perspectives in the TLP curriculum.

As one of the most influential thinkers of critical pedagogy (inspiring even TLP's philosophy and classroom practice), Freire has also been subject to scrutiny by feminist pedagogues (Hart, 1990; hooks, 1994; and Weiler, 1996.) He has been criticized for subtly embodying oppression as a white male (albeit from the global south) through omitting gender or race as factors that contribute to limited access to education and resources (Jarvis, 1992).

bell hooks is one author informed by critical and feminist pedagogies. In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) acknowledges weaknesses and criticisms of Freire's work, yet defends his contribution to the feminist movement. She responds,

"I never wish to see a critique of this blind spot overshadow anyone's (and feminists' in particular) capacity to learn from the insights...there is so much that remains liberatory. Freire's own model of critical pedagogy invites a critical interrogation of this flaw in the work. But critical interrogation is not the same as dismissal" (hooks, 1994, p. 49).

To support this, hooks cites Freire from his book *Learning to Question*, "it is a duty and a right that I have to participate in the transformation of society. Then, if the women must have the main responsibility in their struggle they have to know that their struggle also belongs to us, that is, to those men who don't accept the machista position in this world" (hooks, 1994, p. 57). Although Freire here admits the necessity of participating in all forms of struggle against oppression, he still refers to the women's movement as "theirs," as if it is a by-product of, or a separate struggle in a grander liberation movement.

However, critical and feminist pedagogies can build on Freire's concepts of liberation and empowerment, expanding his dimensions from the examination of the individual's position within larger structures to find ways in which women can use voice to be empowered in their surroundings. To do this, many critical and feminist theories center on dialogue as a learning tool, stressing the important role educators can play in creating a safe environment wherein all voices can be heard and respected (see for example Tisdell, 2000, Vella, 2002).

Many theorists focus on the metaphor of voice as power, and how power relationships and authority shape and are shaped by voice (hooks, 1994; Hayes, 2000; Tisdell, 2000). Women's voices have historically been silenced or marginalized, so exercising the power to speak out can be seen as an act of resistance against domination. Voice can be used either to reaffirm or subvert power imbalances (Hayes, 2000, p. 102). However, Flannery and Hayes and hooks all agree that silence and non-participation can also be forms of resistance in their own right.

hooks (1994) discusses how feminist and critical pedagogies engage the learner in dialogue and create space for each voice to be heard. For hooks, "engaged pedagogy" is a careful attention to each learner's emotional development, as well as the instructor's caring for his or her own needs (p. 157). In her 1989 book *Talking Back*, hooks cites an Audre Lorde poem to illustrate a pedagogical practice that encourages – and sometimes pushes - learners to "come to voice" even when an environment is not entirely safe:

"and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid

so it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive"

(Lorde, as cited by hooks, 1989, p. 16).

hooks stresses risk-taking in "coming to voice" to create richer learning environments and more equitable power relations: "Unlike the stereotypical model that suggests women best come to voice in an atmosphere of safety (one in which we are all going to be kind and nurturing), I encourage students to work at coming to voice in an atmosphere where they may be afraid or see themselves at risk" (hooks, 1989, p. 53). This seems to me an exemplary

model of critical pedagogy that prepares learners to face challenges in their own context, bearing in mind that the world outside the classroom is not always safe or non-threatening.

What would feminist pedagogy look like?

Both critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy share the commitment to creating learning environments that encourage those who have been silenced to find voice. What does this look like in practice? In outlining concrete ways critical/feminist pedagogy can play out in a classroom, Tisdell (1995) makes some suggestions for creating inclusive critical learning environments. To summarize a few,

1. Carefully consider how curricular choices uphold or contest power relations, inside and outside of the classroom.
2. Integrate theoretical concepts with affective and experiential knowledge (linking action and reflection.)
3. Give attention to power relations inherent in knowledge production.
4. Acknowledge power disparities between instructor and learners.
5. Be conscious of how unconscious behavior can reproduce or challenge uneven power relations.
6. Practice democracy in a class environment based on authenticity, critical thinking and dialogue.
7. Adopt emancipatory teaching strategies (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p. 363).

Springing from critical and feminist pedagogies, these suggestions for integrating theory into practice make take into account all that connects the instructor, the learner, the process of learning, the objects of study, and the immediate and broader contexts. They look at what is below the surface of texts, behaviors, and words, and demand a critical examination of these from a perspective of power relations. Incorporating these suggestions (and more, for

further reading, see Tisdell, 1993 and 1995) when implementing the BBB/TLP curriculum could address many of the challenges that TLP instructors anticipated and experienced.

Conclusion

My main project here has been to look at challenges posed when introducing a politically charged curriculum in AE. The politically neutral stance on war that influenced the design of the BBB/TLP curriculum may introduce multiple perspectives, but does not help learners organize or take action, as is characteristic of praxis in critical literacy.

The functionalist paradigm creates a common expectation in our culture that a learner will be able to realize the potential for individual growth, economic gain, or other goals, so long as the learner continues his or her education. The field of AE, even though it is semi-independent from public school systems and state control, has recently been focused on “needs, designs, strategies, and structures” (Merriam and Brockett, 1997, p. 44), and I would add accountability and assessments. However, I would argue that only by defining, learning about and acting on philosophical and political ideals such as redistribution of power and resources will educators really be engaging in pedagogy that may contribute to transforming power structures.

While I view education as a potentially liberating tool, I recognize that instances where it is implemented as such are few and far between. Critical and feminist pedagogies do not inevitably lead to practice in the classroom, nor success in challenging structural forces outside of the classroom. Factors beyond the learner’s scope of control minimize the potential opportunities for the learner to take action in constructing her own learning experience. Ideally, the methodology employed in the TLP classroom will foster a self-discovery process,

and as hooks phrases it, a “coming to voice,” which can lead to more fruitful dialogue and action.

With this in mind, in I present links to lesson plans and resources that coincide with each unit in the curriculum (find curriculum framework outline in Appendix A, and curriculum additions in Appendix B.) I try to present concepts that are relevant to TLP learners’ lives, and that could also provoke further dialogue. I attempted to locate resources with a gender perspective that can fill the gaps I perceived. By engaging the BBB/TLP and contributing to its ongoing development, I hope to provide a gender lens for learning about issues related to the war in Iraq. I also looked for resources that fit the general framework for critical literacy/feminist pedagogy. While I have no control over the way each resource is used, I looked for those that might have shown an awareness of how knowledge is constructed, who has voice and how they use it, and how the power is manifested in the resources, either challenging or maintaining the status quo. Adding critical theory and gender perspectives to the curriculum will touch on issues that are ignored or glossed over, and when looking at the curriculum as a whole, will provide richer learning opportunities of the issues already seen there.

In organizing the suggested curriculum material, I follow the same skeletal format as the existing curriculum, providing links to the resources and brief descriptions. Each instructor will decide what parts of the curriculum they implement in their classroom, and my contribution will be just one more piece to offer to that set of choices. Because the curriculum will undergo a process of constant evolution, I view this project as just one person’s contribution to that ongoing process. I do not consider this project a comprehensive, finished product. I hope that my suggestions for additions to the curriculum will engage the learners

and instructors at TLP in critical dialogue about issues affecting their lives, and encourage them to continue the curriculum building process in a mindful, collaborative way.

Appendix A: Books Building Bridges Curriculum Chart

8-5-05

Curriculum Timeline: Sept		→		June	
Curriculum Overall Meta-goals: Critical Thinking ↔ Civil/Inclusive/Respectful Discourse ↔ Tolerance of Differences ↔ Literacy ↔ Knowledge of Iraq & the Middle East					
Units:					
A. UNDERSTANDING & RESPECTING DIFFERENCES Introductory Unit 1. Activities to begin discussion a. Guiding Principles for civil discourse & tolerating different perspectives b. Identity awareness c. Racism d. Stereotyping e. Opinions vs. Facts		B. MEDIA LITERACY 1. Critical thinking through media literacy i. Determine whose perspective information was written from, and what is the intent/goal/outcome of information ii. How to look for information iii. Website searching skills 2. Bill of Rights 3. Freedom of the Press i. Reporters go to jail to protect their sources 4. Who owns the media		C. IMPACTS OF WAR 1. Financial Costs i. USA federal budget priorities: military budget, education, health care (re: National Priorities Project) 2. Human Costs i. Health issues 1. Mental, physical, during & after war 2. Data on US troops, Iraqi troops & civilians from both countries ii. Cultural/Societal Costs (e.g. history, arts, literature, education, literacy levels, etc.) (Use <i>The Librarian of Basra</i> book) 1. Literacy level pre & post both US/Iraq wars 3. Process of Rebuilding Government & Civil Structures in Iraq: gov't & civil structures pre & post war 4. Understanding the US troops i. Who enters the US military and why ii. Human to human contact with Iraqi / US troops & civilians via pen pals	
D. REGIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF IRAQ/MIDDLE EAST 1. Geographic awareness 2. Overview of history of Iraq & the Middle East: a timeline 3. Basic Islam/religious diversity: Jewish, Christian, etc 4. Historic Culture: contributions to global culture in science, literature, arts, math, architecture, literacy levels, etc. 5. Contemporary Culture: art, literature, etc.		E. US ECONOMY, POLICY & WAR 1. Stated policy for going to war on Iraq in 2003: a timeline 2. Globalism & Environmentalism; US policy & resource use a. Fossil fuels & consumption (G8 population vs. remainder of world)			
Tools & Vehicles - Used Throughout the Curriculum:					
Human To Human Contact ♦ Current Events ♦ Incorporate writing into all units & produce an end product of student and pen pal writing ♦ Speakers ♦ Readings ♦ Web Resources ♦ Documentaries ♦ The Right Question Project ♦ Language Arts ♦ Math ♦ Science ♦ History ♦ Related Curricula Resources ♦ Field Trips & Other Educational Student Motivation Tools ♦ Instructor Training & Development					

Appendix B: Curriculum additions

Activity: Stereotyping

Unit 1: Understanding and Respecting Differences

Activity: Anti-Arab Stereotyping, Discrimination, and Hate Crimes

Provided by: American-Arab Anti-discrimination Committee

http://www.adc.org/Lesson_plan1.pdf

Description:

This is an extensive lesson plan in which learners first establish a working definition of stereotyping, then discuss their views on Arabs in America and in other countries. Learners will examine stereotypes and enrich their knowledge of Arab culture by looking at a variety of geographic, ethnic, cultural and religious features of the “Arab World” to show how diverse it really is. One section identifies prominent public Arab people, while another shows words in English borrowed from Arabic. Included is a portion on stereotypes of Arab women.

Description:

Activity : Who Wears a Veil?

Provided by: PBS

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/educators/women/lesson1.html>

Description:

This lesson plan discusses visual stereotypes of Muslim women. It briefly explains how stereotypes can uphold mainstream ideology. To dispel stereotypes, it looks at meanings of the veil in various cultures, and identifies biographies of women in diverse roles in society.

Additional Resources:

Veiled in Controversy. Retrieved from Teaching Tolerance,

<http://www.tolerance.org/teach/current/event.jsp?cid=271>

Tips for promoting respectful dialogue. Retrieved from Real Talk Live, Team Harmony,

<http://www.esrnational.org/sp/th/harmonydialogue.pdf>

Jones, Susan. *Ten-Point Model for Discussing Controversial Issues*. Retrieved from Educators for Social Responsibility,

<http://www.esrnational.org/sp/we/uw/controversialissues.htm#tenpoints>

Unit 2: Media Literacy

Activity: Stereotyping

Provided by: PBS

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/educators/types/lesson1.html>

Description:

This lesson plan helps learners explore the concept of stereotyping. They will observe and discuss images of the Middle East portrayed by the media, and think critically about these images and stereotypes to evaluate how the media affects their own opinions. There are links to additional resources, such as an article that discusses roles of women in Islam, customs and rights, and political and religious female leaders. There are also more links to related sites.

Activity: Gender Representation

Provided by: Media Studies 20

http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/media20revision/unit1/lesson8/lesson8.html

Description:

In this four-part lesson, gender stereotyping, representation, and cultural construction of gender are studied. The lesson familiarizes learners with concepts such as domination, dismemberment, and sexualization. It uses popular media – mostly magazine images – to discuss and analyze cultural messages about gender, such as desirable body language or behaviors. The modes of teaching/learning include reflection on personal experiences, dialogue, a magazine survey activity, and analysis of gendered media representation through concept mapping.

Additional Resources:

Critical Media Literacy in Times of War. Retrieved from Virginia Tech, Dept. of Teaching and Learning <http://www.tandl.vt.edu/Foundations/mediaproject/home.htm>

Steenland, S. *Women: War Zone Still Seen as Men's World*. Retrieved from Center for Media Literacy, http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article250.html

Killing us softly 3: Advertising's image of women. A film produced by the Media Education Foundation.

www.mediaandwomen.org

Unit 3: Impacts of War

Activity: Women in the Military

Provided by: PBS

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/iraq/women_4-2.html

Description:

This lesson plan accompanies a NewsHour Extra article about the rescue of private Jessica Lynch. It looks at historical roles women have played in the US military, current viewpoints on women in the military, and their role in the war in Iraq. The lesson is relatively value-free, only asking students to explore their thoughts on women in the military as they examine historical and current events in the media.

Activity: You and the Military: Two soldiers, two mothers

Provided by: Teachablemoment.org

<http://www.teachablemoment.org/high/youandmilitary5.html>

Description:

This lesson begins with a reading about two mothers of soldiers who served in Iraq. It briefly narrates, from the mothers' perspective, reasons for their sons' enlisting and consequences of their decisions. Following the reading is a set of discussion questions to encourage students to analyze and interpret two very different stances on the war and mothers' feelings and reactions when sons serve.

Activity:

Provided by: CNNfyi.com

<http://edition.cnn.com/2000/fyi/lesson.plans/10/26/women.peace/index.html>

Description: Based on a news story from CNN on October 2000 entitled, "Protection from Peacekeepers: Women tell U.N. of Abuse by soldiers," this lesson plan looks at the case of UN peacekeepers' alleged abuse of local women worldwide and the U.N.'s resulting discussions and actions. It studies how people have organized and how institutions such as the U.N. function. Learners research nations with peacekeeping forces and look for documented abuses of women in those nations. They formulate a hypothetical plan to resolve the abuses based on the U.N. Security Council's resolution.

Additional Resources:

Ehrenreich, B. – What Abu Ghraib Taught Me. <http://www.alternet.org/story/18740/>

Kim-Puri, H.J. (2005). Conceptualizing Gender-Sexuality-State-Nation. *Gender and Society*, 19(2), 137-159.

Trotochaud, M. (2005). *The Unconquerable Iraqi Woman*. Retrieved from American Friends Service Committee,

http://www.afsc.org/iraq/personal_stories/entries/20040304.htm

Unit 4: Regional Understanding of Iraq and the Middle East

Activity:

Provided by: UNIFEM and WomenWarPeace.org

<http://www.womenwarpeace.org/iraq/iraq.htm>

This is a website rather than a lesson plan but it provides so much food for thought about the ways war has impacted women in Iraq. It sets the stage by locating women in a historical and geographical context and looks at how war has changed their situation, pre- and post-2003. The innumerable links to other sites make this a well-rounded resource.

Activity: Muslim Women Through Time

Provided by: PBS

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/educators/women/lesson2.html>

Description:

This lesson challenges the notions of “monolithic cultures” by looking at a variety of historical roles for Muslim women over time, examining social, political, and economic structures that affect their roles. There are links to websites for further exploration on roles of women in Islam and well-known Muslim women.

Activity: Ancient Tablets, Ancient Graves: Accessing women’s lives in ancient Mesopotamia

Provided by: Women in World History

<http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/lesson2.html>

This website contains information from ancient writings that tell a lot about the way women have historically lived in Mesopotamia. It uses both graphics and quotations to engage the imagination and bring an ancient world closer to home, while providing real historical information.

Additional Resources:

Ismael, J. & Ismael, S. (2000). Gender and State in Iraq. Ch. 9 in S. Joseph (Ed.). *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Inati, S. *Iraq: Its History, People, and Politics*. NY: Humanity Books.

Library of Congress. *A Country Study: Iraq*. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/iqtoc.html>

Unit 5: US Economy, Policy, and War

Activity: Iraq – War and the Aftermath

Provided by: Global Issues

<http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/MiddleEast/Iraq/PostWar/Rebuilding.asp>

Description: Although this is not a lesson plan but a web site, it has numerous links on numerous issues around the war in Iraq. It would be extremely informative for learners to get an overview of policy issues leading up to the war, such as sanctions and the centuries-long struggle for control of resources in the area. There are links to geopolitics, trade policies, human rights and environmental issues, and more.

Additional Resources:

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441 on Iraq:

[http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=S/RES/1441\(2002\)](http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=S/RES/1441(2002))

Cornell, D. (2004). *Defending Ideals: War, Democracy, and Political Struggles*. NY: Routledge.

Bigelow, B. & Peterson, B. (Eds.). (2002). *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Rethinking Schools, Ltd.

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/iraq/index.html> (this website provides almost daily lesson plans that follow current events around the war in Iraq.)

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